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"I WILL BE A FATHER TO THE GIRL, CHIEF, SO HELP ME HEAVEN!" CAME FERVENTLY FROM HIS LIPS.

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Red Butterfly,

OR,

BUFFALO BILL'S LEAGUE.

A Story of Real Characters of Wild Western Life.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

STANDING AT BAY.

A MAN was flying for his life across the wild Western plains, urging his tired horse onward with spur and voice, and glancing backward from time to time with the look of one who gazed into the face of death.

His panting horse was doing all he could, and his staggering gait showed that the pace had been long and hot, while his bleeding flanks revealed the cruel punishment he had received from the rider's spurs.

The country was broken, here and there a plain, a hill, a valley, with bunches of timber scattered about on the streams winding their way over the scene every few miles.

Far behind the horseman were the foot-hills, with a mountain range beyond, and from these his trail led.

The man was dressed in the garb of a Western miner, and from the luggage he carried, it seemed that his horse bore a weight scarcely less heavy than the rider.

His face was heavily bearded, his beard long, and his hair fell below his shoulders.

As he reached a rise on the trail, where were a few rocks and some timber, a party of horsemen dashed out of a thicket a quarter of mile in his rear.

They were a wild-looking lot of men, and were pressing their horses hard to overtake the horseman upon whom they had been steadily gaining for a couple of hours or more.

Beyond him the fugitive beheld an open plain for miles, and the wild shout of his pursuers told him that they now felt sure of their game.

They came out of the timber in a long-drawn-out string, according to the speed of their horses, but the fugitive counted seven in number.

"My God! I must settle it right here, for they would catch me on the open plain yonder did I keep on."

"Seven of them I have to fight, and I have but two shots left in my rifle, and but one revolver loaded."

"If they kill me, they get my fortune, too—the fortune for which I have worked so hard and so long."

"Come, my good horse, we must fight them!" and the man wheeled the animal in among the rocks, dismounted and sought a vantage ground where he could command the approach to his position.

He stood at bay with white face, but stern, fearless and determined.

He knew that it was to be a fight to the bitter end—that he must beat off seven or go under.

He held his rifle ready, with but two shots in the magazine, for it was a repeater, and his revolver lay at hand upon the rock in front of him.

Another revolver was in his belt, but it was unloaded.

Among the rocks, and sheltered from a shower of bullets, stood his horse, his head down-bent, his sides heaving under the terrible strain he had been put to.

It was the fugitive's last stand, where the end would be life or death to him.

The horsemen came on with a rush up the hill, the leader being well mounted and heavily armed, while his darkly-bronzed face wore a sneer of triumph, as he seemed to know the trail and felt that beyond, on the plain, the fugitive would be overtaken.

Behind him, stretched out in single file, came his six followers.

That the horseman had halted in the timber, to stand at bay, did not seem to strike any of them, and they could not have told until they reached the spot where the fugitive stood awaiting them.

The leader dashed on into easy range, yet the fugitive did not fire.

"I must get one with each shot of my rifle," he muttered, grimly, while he waited until the second man was well in range.

Then the rifle came suddenly to his shoulder, and the sharp report followed.

A quick movement of the muzzle, without noting the result of his first shot, and a second report rung out.

Then to the ground was thrown the now useless rifle, and the man at bay seized his revolver from the rock and leveled at the third man, and pulled trigger.

The first shot had sent the leader from his saddle, and he lay like one dead.

The second shot had dropped the second man likewise, while the pistol-shot had brought down the horse, but missed the rider.

The others now halted, held a short consultation, when, suddenly, the leader arose from the ground, and though he staggered as if hurt, ran rapidly back to his companions, whom the man whose horse had been killed had also joined.

The second man, however, did not rise, for the bullet had pierced his brain.

"Three shots gone, and yet six men to meet, and but four loads more left in my revolver," muttered the man at bay, yet he stood his ground fearlessly to await the alternative, adding, in a low tone:

"A few minutes more must tell the story—Ah! there they come, now!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MAD CHIEF.

THE pursuers of the man at bay had lost no time in preparing for a rush upon his position among the rocks.

The leader had mounted another horse, as his own had trotted on and was feeding near the rocks, and putting three of his men on foot, to advance as skirmishers, the other two and himself were to make a charge direct upon the enemy.

At a signal from the leader they all started, the men on foot firing with their rifles as they advanced, and the horsemen with revolvers in hand.

The man at bay stood firm as the rocks above him, raised his revolver and fired, and the leader's horse went down, but the rider caught on his feet and pressed on.

Then the revolver dropped from the hand of the man at bay from the shock of a bullet cutting into his arm.

He stooped quickly and picked it up, but it missed fire, and the thought came over him that death was not a minute away, when, suddenly, from behind, came a whirring sound, then a sharp report, and two of his assailants bit the dust, while from among the rocks dashed two forms, one with a bow and arrow at a ready, the other holding a revolver.

A volley of shots answered from the charging party, and one of those who had come to the rescue uttered a wild, ringing war-cry and fell in his tracks.

A cry of alarm, of hatred and fury mingled broke from the lips of the other rescuer, and the revolver rattled forth shot after shot as the shooter recklessly advanced from cover, when, in dismay, the attacking force, now dwindled down to three, one of whom was the leader, remounted their horses and fled from the scene.

Then the man at bay turned to see who had so opportunely come to his aid.

To his amazement he saw that they were Indians!

One, a large man in full war-paint and wearing the headdress of a chief, lay extended upon the ground, while by his side knelt a young girl of scarcely over fourteen, and from her lips broke a moaning cry like the mournful cooing of a dove for its lost mate.

In an instant the stranger was by her side, when she looked up into his face and said, in broken English:

"Patolla, the great medicine-chief, must die."

A girlish form of grace and symmetry—a face rarely beautiful in spite of its red hue—large, lustrous eyes—teeth white as snow, and even—and a costume of beaded and embroidered buckskin and head-dress of gay feathers were what the white man looked upon.

The chief was breathing heavily, his hand upon his side from which a scarlet stream issued, ebbing his life rapidly away.

His pursuers were forgotten by the white man in the scene he now looked upon, and though he suffered from a wound in his right shoulder, he knelt by the side of the dying chief and said, softly:

"The chief has lost his life in saving mine."

The eyes of the warrior opened, and he said, with an effort:

"Has the pale-face forgotten how he saved Patolla from his foes many moons ago?"

"Ah, your memory is better than mine, chief, for only now I remember you, and how I saved you from the miners."

"Yes, Patolla remembers; but he is going now to the happy hunting-grounds of his people: but his heart is full of sorrow, for his friendship for the pale-faces made his people hate him and drive him with Go-won-go from his village."

"He is going, and Go-won-go, his child, must take the trail with him to the happy hunting-grounds."

As the dying chief uttered these words he suddenly drew from his belt his knife and made a thrust at the heart of the young girl, who did not make the slightest effort to avoid the blow.

But, with a cry of horror, the man at bay caught in his already wounded arm the blade, and saved Go-won-go from death by her dying father's hand.

The chief fell back, fairly writhing with agony, while he said, brokenly:

"The pale-face has saved the Red Butterfly—he must be a father to her, for the Mad Chief must go alone on the long trail."

"I will be a father to the Red Butterfly, chief, so help me Heaven!" came fervently from the lips of the white man, and he rested his doubly-wounded arm, in which still stuck the Indian's knife, upon the head of the Red Butterfly.

The face of the dying Indian lighted with joy at the words of the white man, and, a moment after, from his lips came, in a weird chanting tone, his song of death!

Neither the pale-face nor the Indian girl broke in upon that dying song of the once great medicine-chief, until it grew fainter and fainter, and at last died away in a murmur.

At last it ceased; a shudder ran through the stalwart frame, and Patolla, the "Mad Chief" of the Sioux, was at rest forever.

The girl's head bent over until it rested upon the stilled heart of her father. Softly arose the white man and crept away on tiptoe. The mourner was alone with her dead.

The white man gazed out upon the plain beyond the rocks and beheld four prostrate human forms, and two horses, while, feeding near by, was the splendid black horse of the leader, and further away was an animal of one of his men.

With his revolver in hand, and which had but one shot left, the man walked to the nearest of the dead pursuers.

Bending over he felt for his heart, but it was stilled by death.

He went to another, and another, and they likewise were found to be dead.

The fourth moved as he approached and half raised his rifle, when the revolver of the fugitive was leveled and he called out:

"Drop that weapon! Don't force me to kill a wounded man!"

"Correct, pard! I don't want to die, but I guess I've got to," spoke the man on the ground.

The miner approached in a kindly way and said, after a short examination:

"Not dead yet, for this arrow-wound on your head stunned you, doubtless, but it is slight, and the bullet-wound in your arm is not serious. I'll dress it for you, and you can mount yonder horse and go your way."

"And get what pickings I can from my pards yonder?" avariciously asked the man, with a look of delight to know he was not seriously hurt.

"Yes; as it is a case of dog eat dog, take all they have got, *except* their ammunition; that I want. Had I any, I would have stood your cut-throat band off, long ago."

"You is game, pard; but I guesses had it not been for that Injun chief, and his gal, the Red Butterfly, you'd have turned up your toes."

"You know them, then?"

"Yes, the chief got out with his people because he protected the whites, and they drove him and his party darter off from the lay-outs, and they has been a-rovin' 'round ever since, and hev spoilt several leetle jobs we hed ter hold up coaches by informin' on us, for what them two don't know o' trails hain't wu'th l'arnin'."

"You belong to Kit Quantrel's band, then, I take it?"

"I does belong to ther band they calls the Red Buzzards o' the Overland, pard, fer ther' hain't no use o' lyin', seeln' as how yer knows."

"I thought it was the Red Buzzards in pursuit of me, but was not sure. Your leader, Quantrel, escaped?"

"He allus does," was the laconic reply.

"Well, you be off quick, before I change my mind and kill you, as you deserve!" was the stern command of the miner.

CHAPTER III.

A RED BUZZARD.

THE man who had acknowledged that he was a "Red Buzzard" was considerably startled by the stern and unexpected command of the miner.

He had been seated upon the ground, and now rose as quickly as he could, but the miner saw that he was dizzy and suffered from his wounds, so said in a changed tone:

"Hold! I will not drive you away to die from your wounds, so let me dress them as best I can."

In spite of his own most painful and severe wounds, he drew a large handkerchief from his pocket, and tearing it in strips, bound up the gash in the head, after which he did the same for the shot in the arm, the bullet having cut its way through and through. All this kindness, notwithstanding the man, by his own confession, was one of a band of outlaws known far and wide as a merciless lot.

These wretches had gained the name of Red Buzzards from their cruel deeds and constant robberies, and it was said that Kit Quantrel, their chief, was never known to show mercy.

His motto was that "Dead men are not dan-

gerous," and he was wont to do all in his power to cover up his acts by taking the lives of his victims.

Splendidly mounted, armed to the teeth, with no known retreat, and roaming over a vast extent of country, while they numbered some twenty or thirty horsemen, the Red Buzzards were a terror to the Overland trails, the border settlements and the mining-camps alike.

Many a grave along the Overland showed where a victim of the band had been slain, and such a terror had they become that armed escorts frequently had to accompany the coach or a wagon-train, and even then they were not safe from an attack.

"Pard, I is awful sorry we jumped you, for we got wusted, and I tells yer I thanks yer fer bein' kind ter me, sparin' my life and now a-fixin' me up fer keeps."

"I won't fergit it, an' ef I does, may I never rob another pilgrim."

"After the close call you have had it would be well for you to change your life of evil."

"It can't be did, pard, and I'll tell you why, if you wants ter know."

"Well?"

"Yer see, I were cut out fer a sinner, and I are branded fer life. I kilt a feller back at home beca'se he cut me out with my gal, and they jailed me to keep until the hangman got ready to string me up."

"I got away one night by knockin' ther parson, who come ter pray with me, on ther head and riggin' up in his outfit and going out. I didn't mean ter kill ther parson, only to stun him, but I hit too hard, and he went under."

"So yer see, ef I tained repentant I'd be hanged, and I rather live a sinner than die a Christian, don't yer see, pard?"

"I tried minin', and it panned out pretty well, only I got too flip with keerds and the boys of Red Rock Valley give me jist two minutes' start of 'em ter git out o' ther camps. I got, and bullets were a-whistlin' round my heels as I went; so, as Poker Jack had no reg'lar abidin'-place, he hunted up Cap'n Kit Quantrel and joined the Red Buzzards, don't yer see?"

"I see that you are an unmitigated scoundrel, and I half regret not killing you as I came up."

"Pard, don't feel bad about it, fer some day maybe you may live to see me hang. Yer said I can pick my pards afore I levanted, didn't yer?"

"Yes, Buzzard that you are, pick their pockets and move off, or I'll change my mind about lettin' you go and take you on to the settlements."

"I'm off, pard, at once."

"But let me tell you to git out o' this, too, for Kit Quantrel hain't no man to stand a set-back in patience, and he'll be lookin' for your scalp mighty soon."

"He is welcome to it if he can get it squarely; but how did you know of my coming, for he was ambushed for me, and called me by name when he ordered me to halt?"

"Yer see, we has had orders ter watch yer since yer went inter ther mountings hunting fer gold, and they had it reported in the camps that you hed struck it rich."

"Oh, yes, we knows yer, Yankee Dan, and has been layin' fer yer two years, we Red Buzzards hev."

"And found me at last."

"Yas, we found yer and got left; but fer them Injuns we'd hev hed yer life and them bags full o' gold yer carries."

"I admit it, for the Indians saved me."

"Waal, I supposes yer'll stick to them fer keeps, now, and old Mad Chief will tell yer whar his gold mine is hid away."

The miner saw that the outlaw did not know of the chief's death, so said:

"His gold mine?"

"Yas, fer he knows whar gold are lying thick, they says, and the Vigilantes were a-goin' ter make him tell or die, when you chipped in and saved him, so turn about is as fair play, in this case, yer see."

"Yes, and I now know what their game was—not that they suspected him of wrong-doing, but meant to force him to reveal his secret."

"Waal, I guesses he'll take you inter partnership, and maybe give yer his darter, for it hain't so uncommon a thing fer a pale-face ter marry a Injun, seein' as I has read how Pocahontas set ther example, and you, likely, won't go back on a Injun heiress ef she—"

"Come, be off, sir!"

The stern command convinced the outlaw that no more trifling would be allowed, and he at once replied:

"Yas, Pard Yankee Dan, I'm a-gettin' ready ter tramp myself immediate."

"Yer said I c'u'd take ther chief's horse?"

"No, yonder animal," and the miner pointed to the other horse some distance away.

"I'm gone; but, luck ter yer evermore says I, and I'm not ther man ter fergit yer."

So saying Poker Jack made his way to the bodies of his companions, robbed them, and quickly walking away soon mounted the horse which the miner had pointed to, and rode away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RED BUTTERFLY.

THE miner, whom the outlaw had addressed as Yankee Dan, watched Poker Jack until, with a wave of the hand he disappeared from sight on the back trail, and then he walked toward the splendid black horse which had been ridden by Chief Quantrel.

The horse looked up at his coming, laid his ears back and with an angry whinny started toward him.

Had the miner flinched, or attempted to fly, his death would have been certain; but, instead, he showed utter fearlessness, and leveling his revolver full at the vicious animal spoke to him in a voice that commanded obedience, for, pausing a moment, the beautiful creature acknowledged his master and trotting up to him was as submissive as a slave.

He was, in truth, a superb beast. His equipments consisted of a handsome saddle, silver-mounted, a horse-hair bridle and silver bit, with revolvers in the holsters and a rifle swung to the massive saddle-horn.

"Quite a prize, and most acceptable, as those outlaws killed my riding horse when they fired upon me from ambush."

"It was fortunate that they missed me and my led horse with my gold, so that I escaped," mused the miner and he led the black steed back toward the timber and hitched him there.

His next work was to carry the bodies of the three dead outlaws to a waterwash and place them in it, after which he piled rocks around and over them.

This had taken some little time, and returning to where he had left the Indian girl and the dead chief, he beheld her seated by her father's stiffening form, her head bent low, her hands covering her face.

"I feel for the Red Butterfly in her sorrow; I will be as a father to her now," said the miner, in a low, kind voice.

The girl took her hands from over her face, and it was revealed haggard and full of pain, strangely changed by her hour or more of sorrow.

But she arose and responded:

"The pale-face gold-hunter is good to the Red Butterfly; she will trust him, and he will be her father, for she has no country, no people, no kindred now."

He held forth his hand and took hers, while he replied:

"The Red Butterfly shall have a home and be happy once more; but now, let us lay the chief to rest in his last sleep."

"Go-won-go will obey," she said, softly.

And the miner sought a secluded spot among the rocks where a close clump of pines grew and with his knife began to dig a grave.

In silence she went to work and aided him, using her own knife rapidly, while, with a tin plate taken from his pack-horse, the miner threw out the loose earth.

At last the grave was dug, and the body of the chief, wrapped in the red blanket of the miner, was laid in its last resting-place.

The grave was filled in, and the mound covered completely with heavy stones to keep off the wolves.

Then, in a low, musical voice, Go-won-go chanted the death-song of her people, while the miner stood with uncovered head.

"He has gone to the happy hunting-grounds," he said, at last, as the death-song ended, and he added:

"Now we must look to our own safety, Butterfly."

"Yes, white chief, we must go far away from here," she answered, sadly.

"Where are your horses?" he asked.

"Yonder."

And she pointed to the timber.

"The Mad Chief saw you coming and white wolves on your trail, and we came to aid you," she explained, simply.

"And you saved my life and my fortune, for in these deerskin bags, Go-won-go, are many thousands of dollars in gold."

"Now bring your horses and I will get mine, so we can go on our way."

"Would the pale-face gold-hunter have the Red Butterfly go toward the rising sun with him?" she asked.

"Yes; I will take you to my people, and you will be happy, for you shall learn as the pale-faces do, and live among them."

"Go-won-go will be glad," she said, while her eyes lighted up with pleasure, banishing the haggard look from her face.

She turned away to go after her horses, and the miner stood gazing after her, while he recalled all he had heard of Patolla, the Mad Chief, and his beautiful daughter.

Strange stories were told in the camps of their prowess and courage, and it was said that the Indian and his daughter knew the country as no white guide did, having tracked it over in their wanderings for half a dozen years.

Rumor had it, too, that with rifle, revolver and bow and arrow Go-won-go was a dead shot, while she was a rider of wondrous skill, and could throw a lariat equal to a Mexican, follow a trail unerringly, and was as fleet of foot as a deer.

"I shall educate her, and adopt her as my child, making her my heiress, as I have no near kindred to have claims upon my gold," mused the miner, as he tightened the harness of his pack-horse, which had served him so well.

Soon after Go-won-go came in sight, riding a wiry pony, and with the chief's horse and a pack-animal following.

Mounting the black of the outlaw chief, and leaving his own pack-animal to follow, the gold-hunter led the way along the trail eastward, Go-won-go riding by his side, and the other two Indian ponies bringing up the rear.

CHAPTER V.

MINER'S ROOST.

AWAY up in the mountains, where yellow metal had been found in paying quantities, was Miner's Roost, a place not inappropriately named when its location on a mountain-side was taken into consideration.

But for the fact that a hunter had found gold on the mountain one day, and carried back to the settlement a bagful of it, Miner's Roost would doubtless have been unknown to fame even at this time; but he could not keep his secret, and so many an adventurous spirit turned his steps toward the mountain, and before long the Overland stage company ran a coach there on semi-monthly trips, and found that it paid handsomely.

The "Roost" really was a succession of mining-camps with the center of attraction the terminus of the Overland coach trail, where was a shanty hotel, the company's stables, with an extra coach or two, and a score or more of good animals.

There was a gambling saloon known as "Fortune's Favorite," several drinking saloons, a blacksmith shop, two rival stores and half a hundred miners' cabins within the radius of a mile.

Such was Miner's Roost at the time of which I write, and in addition to a number of honest miners who made it their headquarters, were three times that number of lawless spirits, who mined a little, gambled a great deal, kept uncomfortably loaded with liquor, and were "on the shoot" from sunrise to sunrise.

If the sheriff had come there looking for men guilty of murder, and had selected at random, in seven cases out of ten he would not have gone wrong in his pick.

When the coach came in on a Sunday afternoon it was an event of such importance that half the people in Miner's Roost got drunk in honor of its coming, and upon its departure every Wednesday afternoon a half-day off for an orgie was taken by the tougher citizens.

One pleasant Sabbath afternoon all of the miners were gathered as usual in the saloons, the gambling hall in part of "The Overland Lodge," as Landlord Jerry Thomas (or, as he was nicknamed, Tom and Jerry), called what I will speak of, through courtesy, as hotel.

They were congregated awaiting the arrival of the coach, bearing the mail, passengers or anything destined for Miner's Roost.

A hard crowd they looked, and hard they were, for though bushy beards and long hair more than half-concealed many an honest face, a majority of the number would have been ready for any devilry that might offer an entertainment to their lawless natures.

Among the group were several strange faces, late comers to the Roost, and who seemed anxious to attract as little attention as possible.

Three men kept apart from the others, large-framed, bearded and rough-looking, but whose antecedents had not been looked into by the miners, who took all new-comers upon their own say-so until fitting opportunity occurred to "try them."

Another stranger was present, whose presence perhaps somewhat overawed the miners, for he wore the garb of a frontier parson.

He was dressed in a suit of black, of clerical cut, wore a white tie about his neck, had his pantaloons stuck in his high boot-tops, and his slouch hat was of sable hue and encircled by a band of *crêpe*.

His face was smoothly shaven, his black hair worn long, and there was a suspicion that Parson Prim, as he called himself, could hold his own in a scrimmage with mankind as well as the devil, or his looks belied him.

He wore spectacles and tortured his handsome face into an expression of sanctity that seemed painful.

No weapons were visible on his person, though he did wear a belt, but swinging to it was a buckskin bag which looked as though it was filled with books.

The parson had come among the heathen, as he expressed it, to do good, and Miner's Roost was certainly the place where he was needed, whether his services would be acceptable or not.

"Sunset Sam are late ter-day, parson," remarked a miner.

"And who is Sunset Sam, my brother?" asked Parson Prim, in his deep voice.

"Waal, now, I fergits yer hasn't hung out here a week yit, so hain't seen Sunset Sam; but he are ther best man as holds ther ribbons on ther Overland, fer he kin outdrive any of 'em,

and w'u'd fight ther devil with spurs on ef it wuz fer ther good o' ther comp'ny," explained the miner.

"Then I take it he is the stage-driver?"

"Yas, parson, that's jist what he be— Hark! does yer hear ther music o' his horn? and Sunset kin blow it, too," and there arose from the winding trail below the sound of a stage-horn.

Soon after the coach came in sight, with Sunset Sam on the box, and the miners gathered excitedly around to welcome it.

Sunset Sam, a dashing-looking border prince of the reins, threw the lines on the backs of his wheelers after he had halted, and called out:

"A fresh team, landlord, for orders are to run the old hearse through now down the other side of the mountain to Hard Times, and that leaves Miner's Roost out as a terminus.

"Hitch 'em, boys, for I'm in a hurry, bein' a leetle late and anxious to reach Hard Times by night.

"Meanwhile I'll take a drink and a bite."

And Sam leaped from his box, and two passengers whose destination was Miner's Roost got out, leaving but one other alone in the coach.

Entering the saloon of the Overland Lodge, Sam was followed by most of the crowd, for he generally "discoursed" when taking his drink, giving the news from below in the settlements.

Landlord Jerry Thomas had taken the mail-bag, for he was postmaster, and the fresh horses, a fine team of four iron-grays were led out and hitched up by the two stable-boys, just as the three strange miners referred to approached the coach in which the single occupant sat gazing out upon the scene with considerable interest.

Suddenly the three strangers parted company, one seizing the reins and leaping upon the box, while the other two sprung to the doors of the coach, one on either side, and entered just as the one who held the ribbons brought his whip down with a loud crack upon the leaders and with a loud yell sent the frightened team flying along the ridge toward the trail leading down the mountain toward Hard Times.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTURING A COACH.

THE sudden act of the three strangers, in so quickly taking possession of the coach, had been witnessed by at least half a hundred people, but not a man, with one exception, seemed to understand the situation or know what to do, until the coach was seen flying down the mountain-trail at a pace that even Sunset Sam himself would not have attempted on a run so perilous.

The miners stood like men dazed by amazement and admiration, gazing after the flying vehicle, many of them thinking it a mere joke which the daring perpetrators would have to answer for to Sunset Sam.

The single exception, however, was Parson Prim, who had gone at a deer's pace toward his cabin, back of the Overland Lodge a hundred paces, to reappear in a moment upon his horse without saddle or bridle, flying along in pursuit.

As he went by the Lodge on his steed, the man in black shouted to the miners:

"Pards, that coach has been seized by the Red Buzzard gang! I am off to the rescue!"

A wild shout of alarm went up from the crowd of miners at this, and they beheld the coach an eighth of a mile away flying along at the full speed of the horses, while the parson was following hot on the trail in pursuit.

"The Red Buzzards has got ther coach!"

"Sunset Sam, Kit Quantrel has got yer old hearse!"

"Sunset, yer is wanted mighty quick and awful bad!"

"Holy smoke, look at that Gospil guide! He are a-goin' lickety-split ter tapter ther cusses!"

"That parson will climb ther golden stairs mighty suddint ef he tackles them Red Buzzards!"

"Oh, Lordy! they is a-firin' back at ther parson!"

"But he don't scare fer nothin'!"

Such were the manifold cries that went up from the excited crowd and greeted Sunset Sam as he dashed out of the saloon.

He stood an instant like a man hard hit, gazing after his disappearing coach.

There stood the stable-boys in startled wonder, and as yet the parson was the only one who had gone in pursuit.

On account of the wild country thereabout, few miners owned a horse, and not over a score and a half were to be found in the mountains about the Roost.

But there were animals in the coach stables, the four that had just come in tired out, for the others were in the valley grazing, a mile away—the rules of the company requiring but one team to be kept on hand at a time.

But Sam did not stand long, dismayed, as he called out:

"Come, pards, ther coach has got ter be retaken, for there's big money aboard for the fort above Hard Times. There's horses in the stables."

Away dashed Sunset, followed by a number of miners; but the four tired horses were all

that were to be found, and only as many pursuers could go on them.

Bridles and saddles were seized and put on the animals, and some led off at a gallop, three other mounted men following, while a dozen more ran behind on foot.

"Ther brutes is played clean out, fer I put 'em through hard up the mountain," cried Sam, as he urged the animal he rode to his best speed—those following doing the same.

Arriving at the brow of the hill, where the trail led from the ridge down toward the valley a couple of miles distant, Sunset Sam and the three others with him caught sight of the coach dashing swiftly along and swaying wildly as it went down the steep grade and narrow turns.

It was nearly down the mountain, and nearing the valley, and not far behind it and gaining steadily was the parson.

"Lordy! but don't thet feller drive 'em!" cried Sunset in admiration of the splendid skill and daring of the man on the box.

"Yas, and hain't thet Gospil guide hot on ther trail?" ejaculated one of the men in the rear.

"He's a dandy sky pilot, he is!" asseverated another; and on they rode, urging their horses to all the speed they could get out of them, while far in the rear came the howling mob of pursuers on foot.

It was a most perilous ride to dash down the steep trail, as Sunset Sam and his comrades were doing, and all appreciated the greater danger to the coach and the parson, going at a still more rapid pace, as they were.

"They has reached the valley!" soon called out Sam, and another cried:

"And see how ther parson is gaining!"

"Yas, and thar they goes inter ther timber!"

As the last speaker uttered the words the coach, now at the utmost speed of the horses, dashed out of view into the heavy timber in the valley, to be followed, a second after, by the mad rider in its rear.

"Oh, hearken unto that!" cried Sunset as the rattle of horsemen came up from the valley.

"The parson has tackled 'em single-handed!"

"If we was only there!" howled Sam, pounding the horse he rode unmercifully.

But the firing in the timber had suddenly ceased and one of the pursuers called out:

"They hev did fer ther parson, sart'in."

"I doesn't hear no coach-wheels, pards!"

"Halt! hark!" called out Sam, and they came to a sudden halt and listened.

Not a sound came from the valley, and as the trail was a rocky one, it told them that the coach was no longer in motion.

Something certainly had brought it to a halt, but what that something was, not one of the pursuers could guess.

So on they rode, leaving the foot-runners far behind, and, reaching the valley, dashed on into the timber, where they came upon a strange scene that brought them to a sudden halt.

CHAPTER VII.

A SECRET UNTOLD.

WHAT it was that had suddenly started Parson Paul Prim upon the war-path, after the runaway stage-coach, the miners could not fathom; but certain it was that he had gone off in pursuit, without bridle or saddle upon his horse, and seemingly having no weapons of offense or defense.

And, what was more, though the coach had gotten a fair start of him, he had steadily gained, undeterred by the shots fired at him from the two men who had sprung inside the vehicle, or by the great danger of dashing down the steep trail at a breakneck rate of speed.

As the coach got a good start, the daring driver having his reins well in hand and his foot upon the brake, he called out to the two men within:

"Now obey orders and make no mistake. I'll take care of the team!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered one of the men from within, and they seemed to have such unbounded confidence in the driver as not to watch the mad rush of the horses.

"Hurry up, men, for there is pursuit coming," called out the driver, as he reached the spot where the trail led from the ridge down into the valley.

If he had intended drawing up to a slower pace there, he changed his mind after glancing over his shoulder, for he kept on at the same desperate pace, only bracing himself more firmly in his seat, and grasping the reins with a stronger grip.

He knew that only the greatest skill and daring, added to strength and nerve, could run the gantlet of that down-hill grade.

Presently he called out:

"Open fire on that fellow in black in pursuit!"

One of the men from within the coach obeyed, but the parson was neither hurt nor checked in his pursuit.

Swaying wildly, now seeming about to go over as its two wheels on one side would rise from the ground on rounding a corner of the trail, and then fairly leaping over ruts in the

road, the coach went down the mountain-side with the four horses still on a full run, apparently anxious to get out of the way of the lumbering vehicle.

And in hot chase came the parson, upright on his horse like a centaur, the stake rope held circled in one hand, and with the other resting upon his hip.

He rode without effort, managed his horse to perfection, and by word and a movement of his heels both guided and urged him on.

At last the valley was reached, and the wild driver gave a yell of triumph, which his two men inside the vehicle echoed.

Then the whip was laid on the flying horses, and they bounded ahead with the captured coach at a greater speed, but the pursuing parson still gained steadily.

Ahead the trail ran into a dense growth of timber that shaded the valley, and wound along the edge of a deep canyon for a mile or more.

Glancing back at the pursuer, the wild driver shouted to his men:

"Ho, there! Is the work done?"

"All that can be done, sir, for he has no papers about him," came the answer.

"Curses! Has all this been, for nothing?" cried the irate driver, and then he added: "Then bring him along as a prisoner, and we will force the truth from him."

"He is dying, sir!"

"What! have you killed him?"

"We had to, sir, for he fought us like a tiger."

"Quick! Be ready, then, for the canyon is just ahead! Have the lariats ready, for we have no time to lose. Now for it!"

The orders had been given rapidly, and, as the last words were uttered, the driver put his foot hard upon the brake, throwing his weight upon the reins at the same time, and the horses were checked suddenly.

Down to the ground he leaped, as the door toward the canyon side flew open and his two comrades leaped out with lariats in their hands.

"Run the ropes around that tree, one of you, while I check that mad fellow in black," commanded the driver.

And he opened a hot fire upon the parson with his revolver, one of his comrades doing the same.

The other meanwhile sprung to a tree growing on the edge of the canyon, and passed one end of several lariats lashed together around it, throwing both ends over into the canyon, and, losing no time, he grasped the two and went rapidly down hand over hand to a place of safety, just as the driver and the other man ran up to the tree.

"Curse the fellow; he bears a charmed life!" cried the driver, as the parson still came on at the full speed of his horse.

Then he called out:

"You are sure that Yankee Dan is dead?"

"Yes, chief; his chips are passed in."

"Then his secret dies with him, and our desperate work has been done for nothing. But, quick! down into the canyon, before that man kills us both, for my revolvers are empty."

The man thus commanded lost no time in obeying, and had hardly gone over the edge of the cliff when the one he had addressed as chief seized the lariats and quickly followed.

A moment more and the parson dashed up to the spot, and now in each hand he held a revolver.

CHAPTER VIII.

RETROSPECTIVE—THE GOLD-HUNTER'S MISSION.

FOUR years have gone by since the scene that opens this story, when the head Sioux chief and his daughter, the Red Butterfly, rescued, from Kit Quantrel and his band, Yankee Dan, the gold-hunter.

To keep his pledge to the dying Indian chief, Yankee Dan had taken her East with him, adopting her as his child.

Upon the shores of Lake George, in New York State, he had a home, a farm left him by his parents, both of whom were dead, and there he would have been content to pass his years in the humdrum life of a farmer, and woo and win some country lass, but for a change that came over the spirit of his dream.

Strolling along the lake-shore one day in summer, years before his life in the West, he beheld a sail-boat out upon the waters becalmed, and in it a lad and a young girl, doubtless visitors at the hotel at the head of the lake.

He was startled to see one of those thunderstorms so frequent there, rushing over the mountain-tops, and he quickly hailed and warned the lad of his danger, telling him to take in his sail and pull hard for the shore.

But the boy had lost his nerve, and seemed not to know what to do, and, a few minutes after, the squall struck the little boat and over it went.

But Daniel Darwin, the young farmer, had already laid aside his rifle, thrown off his coat and shoes, and was swimming to the rescue, so that his strong arm grasped the young girl ere she sunk beneath the waters.

"Save him, sir! Oh, save my brother!" cried the girl, forgetting her own peril.

"Can you cling to the wreck for a minute?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!"

"Then I can save the boy," and leaving her clinging to the upturned boat he swam with bold stroke to where the lad, who could swim a little, was just going down.

Back to the boat he bore him and said:

"Cling here now and I will return for you." Then he passed his arm around the slender waist of the girl and bore her to the shore in safety.

Plunging into the lake again he was soon alongside of the upturned boat where the lad was still clinging, though in an exhausted condition.

But the boy was taken ashore as his sister had been, and a rapid walk of half a mile carried them to the home of the young farmer, who at once hitched up his team and drove them to the hotel.

From that day Daniel Darwin knew no peace of mind, for the pretty country girls of his neighborhood were forgotten and he loved Lucita Courtney.

It mattered not to him that she was an heiress, a belle in the aristocratic circle in which she dwelt, and had lovers by the score; he loved her.

He was but a farmer, with his farm and a thousand or two in bank, and had only a common school education; yet he dared to love her, and she returned his love.

To make himself worthy of her he went to college for a year, improved his place, and at last sought her father to beg him for his daughter, whose life he had saved.

And the answer?

He was told that he was poor, that only a rich man could claim the hand of Lucita Courtney, and forgetting that he owed the life of his two children to Daniel Darwin, the wealthy merchant ordered the young farmer from his home.

"I will make a fortune, and then come and claim you; but, oh, be true to me!"

So had the rejected lover written to Lucita, and, renting his farm, he had gone off to seek his fortune.

He had drifted about for years, until at last he turned up in the gold placers of the West and sought to find his fortune there.

More years had gone by ere he at last "struck it rich," but strike it he did, and sending the precious metal East to bank, he had worked on until at last he had dug out his lead, and loading a pack-animal with his accumulated diggings, he had mounted his own riding horse and started on his return home, a bronzed, weather-beaten miner, greatly changed indeed from the handsome young farmer of Lake George.

How near he came to losing his life and his treasure the reader has seen, and then that he went on his way with his girl rescuer, Go-won-go, the Red Butterfly.

His first duty was to fit Go-won-go out as a pale-face maiden and place her at a boarding-school for young ladies, where she could have a thorough education.

Then he returned to his home, had it fitted up in every way and refurnished, after which he went to New York to seek his bride, confident that he could meet no refusal now from her father, when he had a bank account of a couple hundred thousand dollars.

But ten long years had passed since the day when he had rescued Lucita Courtney, a maiden of eighteen, and her brother Frank, a youth of sixteen, from death in Lake George, and many changes had taken place.

Where had stood the elegant mansion of the Courtneys on Fourteenth street, a grand store had been erected, and it was long before he could find any clew to them, for not once had he heard from them since his going forth to find his fortune.

And it was a sad story that he did hear, for Lucita Courtney had been taken to France, where she married a nobleman, and her father had been slain by the hand of his own son, who had gone to the bad and was then a fugitive from the gallows.

Thus had fate dealt most cruelly with Daniel Darwin, and going to his boyhood home he settled down into the life of a hermit.

CHAPTER IX.

GO-WON-GO'S REVELATION.

IN the years that passed, while Daniel Darwin lived the life of a hermit at Lakeside Lodge, his old home, Go-won-go had grown from the little wild Indian girl of fourteen into a beautiful maiden of eighteen.

Her form, tall and slender, yet strong and active, had become extremely graceful, and she had grown to be a marvel to her fellow-students for her powers of endurance and skill as an athlete.

Her adopted father allowed her a horse at school, a rifle and revolvers, and she would constantly keep up her practice in the saddle and with weapons, while she was equally as devoted to her studies and in seeking accomplishments to make her shine in the civilized world.

Beautiful in face, generous in nature, and

courteous toward all, she was a general favorite with teachers and pupils, and, in company with a governess, had passed her vacations in traveling, though she always devoted a few weeks to a camping party in the Adirondacks, for the old wild life she had led as a girl would assert itself at times.

On such occasions she was the champion huntress of the party, and no more feared to hunt a bear than did the sturdy guide, while he frankly acknowledged her greater skill as a trapper and shot.

Such was Go-won-go when she entered upon her last year at school.

The senior year had just begun, when, one day, her adopted father came to the academy to see her.

She saw that he looked pale and haggard, and it reminded her of how much he had aged in the past four years.

When she had met him upon the plains, he was a handsome man of thirty-four, hardly looking so old by half a dozen years, but now his hair was threaded with silver, and his face wore a settled look of sadness.

The iron had entered deep into his soul, and he had bitterly mourned his lost love.

"Come, walk in the grounds with me, Butterfly, for I have something to tell you," he had said.

She obeyed, and when they were seated in a rustic arbor overlooking the grand Hudson River, on the shores of which the school was located, he said:

"Butterfly, I will have to go to the West again."

"Indeed, my father! Not for long, I hope?"

"I cannot tell; I hope a few years will suffice; but let me tell you why I go."

"Yes, my father."

"I have lost nearly every dollar I had in the world, Go-won-go. I placed my money in two banks, drawing interest enough to give us a handsome income. One bank failed a month ago, and, last week, the other, which was so connected with the first one, closed its doors, and thus my fortune is swept away, excepting some accumulated interest I had laid by at home."

"You understand me fully, Go-won-go?"

"Yes, my father."

"The home I still have, and it will support us; but I was determined to make you an heiress, and I will yet do so, for I shall go again to the mines and become a gold-hunter, and if Fortune favors me you shall yet be a rich girl, worthy of your beauty, your education and accomplishments."

"You are a noble man, my father, and have been so good to me; but, do I understand that you are going on a hunt for gold?"

"Yes, Butterfly."

"You know not where a lead can be found?"

"No, I must look for one."

"That is an endless task, as well I know, and you may never find gold."

"Very true; but I can try."

"You had better go to where gold is."

"Ah! but I do not know, as I dug out my mine, clean."

"But, I know."

"You know, Butterfly?"

"Yes, my father."

"I do not understand."

"Well, it is a secret I have kept to myself, intending to tell you and go with you when I had finished my education; but now, my father, you must go to my mine, for it is mine, as my Sioux father found it in the long ago and gave it to me, making me his heiress, Indian though he was."

"I have the map of this mine drawn on buckskin, though it is now greatly faded; but so well do I know it that I will draw it for you from memory, and you are to go then and find it."

"You amaze me, Butterfly," cried the miner excitedly.

"I am glad that I do, for I can send you on a sure mission, and in the year that I am yet at school, my father, you can be digging out gold, my inheritance, hence your own, for all is yours, of course."

"Go there, and by the time I graduate we will be rich, richer than ever before if I remember aright about the quantities of yellow nuggets I saw there."

"What do you say, my father?"

"Go-won-go, I will gladly go, for you shall yet be the heiress I had hoped to make you."

"And you will sorrow no more now for your broken banks?"

"No, I have a new lease of life and can work with a will."

"Wait here, now, my father, until I go to my room and draw the map, which will not take very long; then I will come and tell you all I can to aid you, and my word for it, when next we meet again, I will be as rich an heiress as you could wish; and more—I will have received my education and be an accomplished young lady, if I am of a hated red-skin race."

"Oh, how I wish I had been born a boy, for there is so much that a man can do which a woman cannot, and I would gladly raise my people from what they are to civilization; but, I fear that is only a dream from which the

awaking will prove the sad reality of an impossible scheme.

"But now for the map of the mine," and she glided away with a noiseless step and grace natural to her.

One hour after the map was in the hands of Daniel Darwin and within ten days' time he was following the star of empire westward.

CHAPTER X.

AN OVERLAND PASSENGER.

"PARD, we have met before, if you are Yankee Dan."

The speaker was not a prepossessing-looking personage, and stood before the door of a stage station on the Overland.

The one he addressed was Daniel Darwin, who had just alighted from a stage going westward, and which had been called to halt for a few days on account of the heavy rains the week past which had overflowed the streams rendering travel on wheels impossible for awhile.

"Yes, I was known as Yankee Dan years ago, when I dwelt in the mines; but I fail to recall your name," replied Darwin.

"Gold Brick George, I was called then, but I struck it rich and retired from biz, so hang out now where it suits me best."

"Yes, I recall you now, and that you were in luck. I was down in luck then, and am so again, for I have lost all my savings, so am going again to the mines to work."

"Well, luck to you, pard, and I hope you'll cross my trail again."

And with a grasp of the hand, Gold Brick George walked away, leaving Yankee Dan to content himself as best he could over the delay in travel.

Gold Brick George walked like a man who had work to do, and made his way rapidly to a cabin upon the hills.

Here he dwelt with a negro servant to whom he called out:

"Come, Black Jack, get my roan mare, quick, and fix me up a bag of food, for I must take the trail at once."

"Yer'll git drowned, boss, sart'in."

"I must risk it for I have news to carry of importance."

"Yas, boss."

The home of Gold Brick George did not look like that of a man of means, one who had retired to live on his money; but appearances are often deceptive, and he had the reputation in the neighborhood where he lived of having money, though he was known to gamble constantly.

He was soon mounted upon a wiry animal and riding along the trail leading westward.

It was three days before he reached his destination, and that happened to be a camp in the mountains which the Vigilantes would have given much to find.

It was, in a word, the retreat of Kit Quantrel, the Chief of the Red Buzzards of the Border.

The chief was "at home" when Gold Brick George arrived, and he was glad to see the visitor.

He was seated in a walled tent, the interior of which was furnished as comfortably as though it was the army headquarters of the general commanding in the field.

A negro servant was cooking supper at a fire near by, while another was grooming one of half a dozen splendid horses in the timber in the rear of the tent.

Half a dozen other tents of the A pattern were scattered about, and fully a score of men and half a hundred horses and mules were in full view.

"Captain Kit," as the outlaw chief was familiarly called by his men, was, in reality, a young man, having scarcely passed his thirtieth year.

His form was perfect, his manners courtly as those of a Chesterfield, and his face was a handsome one if a person did not study it too closely, but, to the close observer it could be seen that it was indelibly stamped with evil.

He was dressed in deep black, top-boots and sable sombrero, while upon the table by his side—a table made to fold up and pack on a saddle—lay a red mask in exact imitation of the head and beak of a buzzard.

This mask, worn by all the band when on the trail of booty, fitted over the face, giving the human head a most remarkable appearance, and one well calculated to appall the beholder.

"Well, Gold Brick, good news alone could have caused you to ride so far, so what is it?" demanded Captain Quantrel, leaning back in his easy camp-chair.

Gold Brick took a seat on a camp-stool, with the air of a man who felt he had news to tell, and answered:

"Captain, have you forgotten the man who gave you that wound in the arm and used up our band?"

"I have nearly a dozen wounds to remember, George, and our band has been cut up badly a score of times."

"I mean, sir, the one who was rescued by the Indians just as we were about to capture him, and whom we ambushed, killed his horse and thought we had done for him, only he leaped upon his pack-horse and got away?"

"You refer to Yankee Dan, the gold-hunter?" eagerly queried the chief.

"That's the man, sir. Well, he has come back!"

"He has? I always thought he would."

"And said so."

"Yes, for he took the Indian girl with him, and I guess she knew her father's secret about the gold-mine the old medicine-chief found."

"She has told Dan about it and he's come after the gold."

"That's about it, captain, for he said he had lost his fortune and had come back to go mining again."

"Where is he?"

"He came in on the stage to my station. I recognized him and had a talk with him. The storms delayed the coach there for some days, but I pushed right on to tell you."

"But, which trail does he take?"

"His ticket was through to Hard Times by way of Miner's Roost."

"Yes, it was up beyond that where the Sioux chief had his camp. You have done well, Gold Brick."

"I was anxious to let you know, captain."

"How far is he behind you?"

"Five days, or four at the least."

"Good! that will give me a chance to act. I will go to Miner's Roost with a couple of men and lie in wait for him. He has the map of the locality of the mine and all directions, I'll bet high on that."

"You have done well, indeed, Gold Brick, and I'll remember you for it accordingly," and the outlaw chief warmly grasped the hand of his spy.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRICKEN GOLD-SEEKER.

DANIEL DARWIN had reached Miner's Roost upon his way westward, and the prospect was before him of being in the locality of the mine of the Red Butterfly within a couple of days more.

The Overland Company had decided, as the miners were now pushing well beyond Miner's Roost, and as a military post had also been placed in the lower end of Yellow Run Valley, to run their coaches to Hard Times, as the route end.

This mining-camp was a counterpart of Miner's Roost, as far as population was concerned, and its prosperous condition belied its name.

From a point further on along the main line of stage travel, a semi-weekly coach was to be run to Hard Times, thus meeting the one from Miner's Roost.

This made Hard Times the real terminus instead of Miner's Roost, and a very fair trail ran between the two places, distant some forty miles from each other.

Surrounding Hard Times, in the mountains and valleys, some good leads had been struck and valuable pockets of gold found, so the miners surrounded the place for a distance of ten miles, or more, like pickets around an army.

At Hard Times Daniel Darwin intended to purchase a riding-horse and pack-animal to go to the Indian's mine.

He knew just what he needed, and had made all necessary purchases back in Omaha, of saddle, bridle, blankets, implements of work, and provisions.

There he had come along on the coach, and was congratulating himself, as he glanced out of the stage window at Miner's Roost, that his long and wearisome journey was nearly at an end.

As Sunset Sam was anxious to get over the worst part of the new road before dark came on, only a short stop was to be made at the Roost, and, as the reader has seen, it was shorter than had been intended by the driver.

The three strangers who had come into the camps a few days before had drawn near when Sunset Sam came to a halt.

They were Kit Quantrel and two of his picked men, and they had learned the country well.

Intending to take passage on the coach, which Gold Brick George had reported was to go through to Hard Times on that run, Captain Quantrel, guided by his impulsive and reckless nature, had suddenly decided upon running off with the stage.

A low command to his two men, and the three took positions of vantage, and watched the hitching up of the fine fresh team.

Quantrel was a superb driver, and knew what he could do, and was daring enough to attempt any feat, no matter how desperate.

At a signal from him, as we have recorded, the two men sprung to the stage-doors and entered, one on either side, while he mounted the box and away dashed the horses at full speed.

The two men who sprung into the coach had entered with revolvers covering the solitary passenger.

Darwin had dropped back half asleep, when he was awakened by two pistol-muzzles under his eyes and heard the words:

"Keep quiet, pard, or you are a dead man!"

But, conscious of his strength, Darwin knew

what he could do and had no fear. By a quick movement he struck up the weapons and grappled with his foes.

There began a terrible struggle then in the coach, of two against one.

Picked for just such work, the two outlaws were powerful men and yet they found it no easy task to manage the passenger.

No weapons were used at first, for the men did not wish to kill their victim, then, at least, and Darwin could not draw his revolvers with his arms in the grasp of his assailants.

On rushed the stage, rocking, reeling and leaping, and still the combat continued.

Down the mountain trail it went, and, as the daring driver called out that pursuit was coming, and their victim was not yet mastered, one of the men brought a revolver down with telling force upon his head.

With a groan the arms of the lone passenger relaxed their hold upon his assailants and he fell, limp, back upon the rear seat.

"We've done for him, pard."

"I had to; but you must open on whoever is in pursuit, while I git the papers from him if he has any."

One of the men opened fire from the window of the coach upon the parson, while the other searched their now unconscious victim.

"Holy smoke! he hain't got no papers!" cried the searcher.

"He must hev, so look ag'in, and look quick, er ther cap'n will dash us all ter pieces afore long. Great Jehosaphat! how he drives," and both men and their victim were thrown across the coach by a sudden lurch.

Quickly they again searched the senseless man, they drew off his boots, ripped open his coat and other clothing, but nothing was found other than his purse and in it a hundred dollars or so, of money.

This was appropriated then and there by the man who found it, while his comrade was firing out of the window at the pursuing horseman. The parson, undaunted, was still running down the outlaws in the stolen coach like a terrible destroyer, and apparently bullet-proof.

But the search was useless; the command came from the chief to be ready: the coach halted suddenly and the trio of Red Buzzards made good their escape over the cliff, as we have seen.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PISTOL PARSON'S PATIENT.

WHEN Parson Paul dashed up to the spot where the coach stood, a strange scene met his view.

The horses stood there, covered with foam and panting like hounds, almost used up by their wild run.

The coach was unharmed, in spite of its rough usage, and, hanging out of the open door, was the head of the sole passenger bleeding from the cut from the pistol and looking very deathlike.

He had fallen thus as the men sprung out, and looked as they believed him to be—dead.

Leaping from his horse the parson ran to the edge of the canyon and gazed over.

No one was to be seen, and the lariats placed around the tree had then been drawn down by the outlaws.

The canyon was fifty feet deep there—sheer down the cliff-side, and at no other spot for a mile or more could one go down into it except as the Red Buzzards had done.

Then the parson turned quickly toward the coach and taking the limp form in his powerful arms, he bore it to a grassy plot near by and laid it full length upon the sward.

Then he placed his fingers upon the pulse like one who knew just where to find the pulsation, and bending his head, laid his ear over the heart.

"He lives! Now to find how he is wounded," he said, and hastily searched for a wound on the body.

There were scratches and bruises, received in the desperate struggle in the coach, a red mark of fingers upon the throat, but no other wound than that on the head could the parson discover.

Just then up dashed Sunset Sam, and following him the three other mounted men.

"Bully fer you, my Gospil guide! I'm yours fer life!"

"Yer run 'em down game as a wolf, and has captered my coach, critters and all," cried Sam, throwing himself from his panting horse and grasping the parson's hand.

"I was unable to overtake them, and their plan was to escape at this point, for they had their lariats ready and went over the cliff at that tree. Do you know them?"

"Waal, not seein' of 'em, I can't say as I am intermately acquainted with 'em."

"They were Quantrel and two of his men."

"Red Buzzards was they? Waal, it were just like 'em. But they got nothin' from ther coach, I sees."

"No, though they may have killed this poor fellow. See how his clothes are torn; and, as they did not use their weapons upon him, I am sure they did not intend to kill him, but they must have known of his coming and so planned to rob him."

"What he had of value, or that they wanted, they evidently got."

"And you crowded 'em too close for 'em to take the box sent on to the new military post!"

"Pard, I owes yer friendship fer life."

"I don't think they knew you had money along, and planned only to rob this passenger, whom we must get back to the camps and do all we can to save."

"See here, pard, you knows a heap fer a parson, and yer tackled them fellers like yer was ther devil if yer got r'iled."

"Because I am a parson, my friend, it is no reason why I should not do my duty as a man if called on to do so."

"Right you are; but I must git along. Ther gent were booked fer Hard Times, and I has considerable truck aboard for him."

"You must leave him here, Sam; the men will carry him and his belongings up to the Overland Lodge for he is nearer death than life."

"Here come the men now."

And the parson referred to half a hundred miners coming along at a run and stretched out in a long line on the back trail.

As the crowd dashed up, they gave the parson a rousing cheer, and rapid questions were asked regarding how matters stood.

Sam explained the situation while Parson Paul was examining the wound on the unconscious man's head.

Sunset was loud in his praise of the parson, and when he ended his story of how "bullets didn't scare the Gospil sharp fer nothin'," he called out:

"Now, pards, three cheers and a catamount fer ther fightin' Gospil guide, ther Pistol Parson!"

The cheers were given with a will, and, rising, the parson raised his black sombrero and said:

"I thank you, my friends, for your cheers; but this poor fellow needs our aid at once. I wish volunteers to carry him and his traps back to the camps."

"We is all here fer ther work, parson," answered one, and the crowd echoed his words, while Sam asked:

"But what about ther Red Buzzards?"

"They have escaped in a way that gives them a long lead, and we have no horses to pursue, while, to follow their trail on foot would be hard work, and, if found, ended by night."

"You is a-preachin' now, Pistol Pard," cried Sam.

And he prepared to mount his box and continue on his way, having seen that the passenger was in a way to be properly cared for.

Parson Prim hastily made a litter; the wounded miner was placed upon it, and volunteers gently raised it to their shoulders, while others walked near to relieve them when tired.

Sam drove on alone on his lonely trail, and the march back to Miner's Roost was begun.

"Take him to my cabin, my friends," ordered the parson.

And he was obeyed, the wounded miner being placed on the cot in Parson Prim's cabin.

And that night three-fourths of Miner's Roost got drunk celebrating the pluck of the "Pistol Parson."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PISTOL PARSON.

THE cabin of Parson Prim was situate upon a spur of the mountain towering over Miner's Roost.

It was a hundred feet above the Overland Lodge, and looking down upon it, the saloons, stores and blacksmith shop.

A steep, winding path led to it. There was a level plateau in the rear where the parson kept his horse, and from which a rugged trail led back along the ridge, coming out in the trail a mile away.

The cabin had belonged to the first discoverer of gold in those parts, but he had been killed, and it seemed that ill-fortune had dogged all who dwelt there, until the miners, always superstitious, would not live therein.

It had been vacant for a year when the parson arrived and at once took possession, against all warnings of ill-fortune befalling him if he did so.

The cabin had two rooms, was well built, had a shed along the front which served as a piazza, and a shelter in the rear for a horse in bad weather.

The view from the front was a grand one, commanding the mining-camps, and mountain, valley and river for miles.

A cot, a bunk against the wall, and a bench, comprised the furniture in the sleeping-room, and a table, some shelves, several rustic chairs, and some cooking utensils, furnished the other, which was kitchen and sitting-room combined.

The parson had some books, writing materials, and a trunk which he always kept locked, as he did also the door of his cabin.

He had lived in Miner's Roost for a month, and was a mystery to the miners.

He had preached several times, what the miners called "sensible chin-music," he sung well and led in singing hymns, but, thus far,

the people had not found him a "praying parson."

He had arrived on horseback, one afternoon, and his traps had followed upon Sunset Sam's coach, when he at once settled down as though he had come to stay.

He had a repeating-rifle in his cabin, but the miners had never seen him carry it with him, and, as for revolvers, they did not believe he possessed any.

From camp to camp he would go, talking with the miners, and singing for them if they asked, and he was frequently seen upon the trails, often on foot and sometimes on horseback.

He was popular with all, and yet, somehow, the miners stood in a certain awe of him, for there was something about him that commanded respect, and a reserve they could not break through.

After his chase of the stage-coach, they were wild in his praise.

The wounded passenger was placed on the cot in the parson's cabin, and, dismissing all but Landlord Jerry Thomas and a couple more, Parson Paul set to work to see just how badly the man was hurt.

There was no doctor near, no surgeon nearer than the military post sixty miles away; but the parson had shown himself such a good hand in sickness, such a good nurse to the miners, they felt sure the wounded man would not suffer.

"The skull is fractured, and what the result will be time alone will show," he announced, after a most critical examination of the wound, which caused Landlord "Tom and Jerry" to ask:

"Hain't you studied medicine, parson?"

"Yes, I have studied medicine," was the quiet rejoinder; "and I know enough about surgery to understand that the chances are largely against this man's recovery."

"If he does recover, he will doubtless be insane."

"What a pity, fer he's a nice-lookin' gent."

"Them Red Buzzards was a-trackin' him, sure, and what they got from him they alone knows," said the landlord, sympathetically.

"Well, I shall do all in my power for him, and he must have constant care, so the boys must take turns to be with him, as I cannot be here always."

"All he needs, Brother Thomas, I will pay for."

"No you don't, parson, for I will chip in my share, and the boys who nuss him will do it willin'. You has a bigger job than you thinks in savin' souls in these parts, and don't you forget it, for we is the honerariest lot o' sinners I ever struck on the trails o' life."

"No; the boys nusses him; I chips in ther grub, and you does ther doctor work and prayin' fer the rest o' his soul ef he don't git well."

So it was arranged, and many and willing ones were found to give half a day and night to the care of the wounded stranger.

His traps were opened by the parson, but not a thing was found to give his name or tell aught about him.

He was well fitted out, well dressed, and was, without doubt, on his way to the mines—which was all that could be discovered regarding him; but that the Red Buzzards knew him, had tracked him to the Roost, and robbed him, all felt assured.

The day after the occurrence, the parson mounted his horse, after giving instructions to the nurse of the wounded miner, and departed.

That night he had not returned, and several miners reported having seen him in the canyon following a trail—that of the Red Buzzards, without doubt.

He was on foot, and his horse was following.

After he had gone by they had gone down and searched for a trail, but other than those left by the parson and his horse they could not find any, yet certain it was he had discovered something to track.

The next morning he appeared at his cabin, but made no reference to where he had been.

His patient had fever, and still hovered between life and death.

That night a party of horsemen rode into Miner's Roost, and put up at Overland Lodge.

They were scouts from the fort, and their leader was Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SCOUTS' LEAGUE.

SOME months prior to the capture of Sunset Sam's coach by the Red Buzzards, a number of men were gathered in a canyon some hundred miles distant from Miner's Roost.

They had come there in twos and threes, and one by one, mounted, and as though the place had been a rendezvous for some important meeting.

Their horses were hitched near in a thicket, and fine animals they were, every one of them.

The riders were as dashing, daring-looking a lot of men as ever wore buckskin, and they were booted, spurred and equipped for the trail, for each one of them was armed with repeating-rifle, revolvers and lariats.

The first to arrive upon the scene, and he came

alone, was a man known in the world's history as the king of border scouts—Buffalo Bill,* then chief of scouts at Fort Venture, the furthest outpost at that time on the frontier.

"We are first on hand, Trailer," he said to his horse as he dismounted and staked him out not far away, after giving him a drink from a spring near by.

"But, there comes Number Two," he added, as a horseman came into view down the canyon.

"And it's Texas Jack,"† he added as he recognized the rider.

The new-comer came on at a canter, riding with the ease and grace of one born to the saddle, and called out in a cheerful way as he rode up:

"Hello, Bill! I'm Number Two, I see; but, what's up, that we are called to rendezvous here?"

"Breath is too valuable, Jack, to throw away, so I'll tell you when all arrive," answered Cody.

"I'm not curious, Bill, so can wait. I got your message and came right along, and Jack Crawford told me others were to be here."

"Yes, the whole Scouts' League, or the pick of them, Jack. There come three men now."

"Yes, Jack Crawford, Bony Ernest, and Tom Sun."‡

"All will be along soon, for they are coming in on time," Buffalo Bill said.

The three scouts rode up and greetings were cordial all around.

They had not been long in the canyon before two others arrived, and were hailed as Night Hawk and Broncho Bill Powell.§

Dark-faced, black-haired handsome fellows were these two brothers in buckskin, loved by their friends as noble men and feared by their foes and red-skins as dangerous in the extreme when on the war-trail.

Half an hour after their arrival a single horseman rode up—a man whose name will live in song and story as long as romances of the Wild West are written and read.

It was Wild Bill,|| scout, guide and Indian-fighter.

He was a splendid specimen of manhood, and a pleasant smile crossed his dark, handsome face as he was greeted by his comrades, who knew him well and respected him.

"There is one more to come, pard, and then our League of Nine is complete," said Buffalo Bill, running his eyes over those present, as he counted aloud:

"Wild Bill, Texas Jack, Night Hawk, Broncho Bill, Jack Crawford, Bony Ernest, Tom Sun and myself."

"Who is the other, Bill?" asked Texas Jack.

"Frank Powell."¶

And the name was welcomed with a cheer.

"Well, he does beat the Jews, for, though a surgeon in the army, he's always ready for a scout with us," Texas Jack remarked.

"Yes, and no better scout, or braver, trails the plains," Wild Bill declared.

"Well, he's an honorary member of our League, and deservedly so, and when I gave him a hint of what I had on hand, he said he was to be counted in, too," Buffalo Bill explained.

"And there he is," Bony Ernest called out, as at a long, sweeping gallop a horseman came into view.

He was mounted upon a long-bodied, clean-limbed bay mare, with Mexican saddle and silver-mounted bridle.

He was dressed in a fatigue uniform, with a black sombrero encircled by a gold cord.

A very handsome man he was, with a physique of iron and a face kindly though resolute and fearless.

His hair fell below his broad shoulders in waving masses and was jet-black, while his eyes were piercing and strangely bright.

He raised his sombrero in a courtly way as he drew rein, and, dismounting, turned his horse loose with perfect confidence that she would not leave him.

"Well, Cody, I am a trifle late, but here I am at your service," he said, pleasantly.

* Colonel Wm. F. Cody, late chief of scouts, U. S. Army.

† J. B. Omohundro, the noted scout, who died in Leadville, several years ago.

‡ Captain Jack Crawford, known as the Poet Scout, and one of the best scouts on the plains—now in Government service. Bony Ernest and Tom Sun are scouts and guides to-day, and are noted Indian-fighters.

§ Night-Hawk George Powell, and his brother, Will Powell—Broncho Bill—have won fame as plainsmen, from Texas to Utah. Some years ago they gave up a wild life on the border, studied medicine, and are now practicing physicians in Wisconsin.

|| J. B. Hikok, a noted Union scout and spy, and also a plainsman known far and wide for his many deeds of desperate daring. He was assassinated some years ago in Deadwood, by Jack McCaul.

¶ Doctor Frank Powell, now practicing medicine in La Crosse, Wisconsin, once a surgeon in the U. S. Army, then a scout and Indian-fighter, and later known as White Beaver, the medicine-chief of the Winnebagoes. Doctor Powell is a brother of Night-Hawk and Broncho Bill Powell, and was known on the plains as "Fancy Frank" and "The Surgeon Scout."

"We are all here now, Doc, and I wish to say that I have a plan to propose which one must undertake alone, with the rest of us as allies."

"It will be deadly work, fatal work, and maybe one after the other will go under in it; but we must pledge ourselves to carry it through, and if the one whose lot it is to start in falls, then we will draw lots again for another to take his place."

"Now, without knowing what it is, who will draw lots to start the deadly work?"

Every one answered promptly that he would be the first!

"I knew none of the crowd would wilt, pard, and I borrowed from the quartermaster some chips—eight white and one red one."

"I will put them into this buckskin bag, and each man draws, and he who gets the red chip is the man to take his life in his hands for the work on hand. You draw first, Surgeon Powell."

With a smile Frank Powell thrust his hand into the bag and quickly drew it out, all eagerly watching him.

"I have drawn the fatal red chip, pard, and am ready," said the surgeon scout, holding up the ivory chip for all to see, while not an expression of his face changed at dread of what was before him.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RED CHIEF.

"I HAVE drawn the fatal red chip, pard!"

The silence which fell upon the group of scouts, gathered there in the canyon, when Dr. Frank Powell, the first one to draw a lot from the buckskin bag, held up the red chip, could almost be felt.

Not an expression on the face of the surgeon scout showed that he dreaded the ordeal through which he must pass, and which the words of Buffalo Bill had led all to feel must be almost certainly fatal.

He seemed rather to enjoy having drawn the red chip, for he was the first one to break the silence with the remark:

"I'm the winner, Bill, so what are the stakes to be played for?"

"You've got nerve, Doc," answered Buffalo Bill, admiringly.

"Yes, a nerve of finest steel," chipped in Wild Bill.

"One of my profession should never allow his nerve to be shaken, you know; but now, Bill, tell us what your plan is, and what trail I am to follow, which, you seem to think, death lies in ambush at the other end of?"

"In a word, Surgeon Powell, you must run down the Red Buzzard!" announced Buffalo Bill, and a wild cheer greeted his words from the assembled scouts.

"That's fun enough for me," quietly responded the Surgeon Scout.

"Well, without a reflection upon any one else, I believe you are the best man for the work, doctor; but I'll tell you my idea."

"Out with it, Cody."

"You know that reports are constantly coming in of coaches held up, settlements robbed and horses being run off from the Overland stations by Captain Quantrel and his band, and there are three rewards offered for the outlaw chief, dead or alive."

"But the rewards are not so tempting as the chance is for the Scouts' League to run the Buzzards to their roost, and hang every one of them."

"They have no regular retreat, I am sure, or, if they have, no one outside of the band know where it is. They move quickly, first on one trail, then on another, and strike where they please."

"Now I wish to find out just where they can be found, and who they are, and where they have their spies, for spies they certainly have, in all the camps."

"If we can track them once, get in with them, in fact, we can easily wipe them out."

"As we are needed at the fort, I can spare only one man for the work, and none but the commandant must know why he is absent, and he must become miner, stage-driver or anything else in which he can best do his detective work."

"Do you see?"

"I do," answered Surgeon Powell, in his quiet way, while he diligently whittled a stick with his bowie-knife.

"Now, no one knows," continued Buffalo Bill, "how many of these outlaws there are. There may be a dozen, for as many have been seen at one time, and perhaps three times that number, though I do not believe they can muster over twenty."

"How to go to work, Doc, I leave to you, for, if any person can track a villain, you are that man."

"Somehow I have a horror of a villain, Bill, and his very presence betrays him to me, it seems."

"But wherever I go I must be able to get you and our pards within call if I need them."

"That is just it, and I will name half a dozen points where you can leave a letter each week, and one of us must make the rounds every ten days to see if you have communicated with us."

"Here is a map I have drawn of the Overland and its branch trails, with the fort, mining-camps and other settlements, and the points marked are where letters are to be left.

"At Number One you will find a tree that has been struck by lightning, and there is a hollow in it just the height of your head when mounted.

"Number Two is a cliff near a spring, and a loose rock on the side of the canyon you will see, so put a letter beneath it.

"Number Three is a tree standing by itself, and one limb you can reach from horseback and pull down, so you can wrap a letter in the leaves and tie it onto a branch.

"Number Four is to leave a letter with Nick Saunders, the landlord of the Last Chance at Hard Times, for he is a true pard of mine, and Number Five is right here in this canyon, at any place you may select.

"I'll give you the map, and a copy to each one of the boys, to study up and then destroy.

"If you leave a letter at a point, tell us when and where we are wanted, and how many of us you need, and we'll be there as soon after we hear from you as horseflesh can carry us."

"I know that well, Bill, and shall go on my mission assured that I have you all to call upon when needed. If we don't wring some Buzzards' necks it will not be my fault, for I go in to win," the Surgeon Scout remarked, with his usual quiet decision.

"Yes, but we do not expect wonders, Powell, at short notice, for this is such serious business you enter upon, it may take a year to get that band of cut-throats in your power; but, in the end, it will be done. They will suspect no secret work against them, and can guard against open scouting after them and outwit us as a body."

After some further conversation, the scouts mounted their horses and left the canyon as they had come, excepting that Buffalo Bill and Frank Powell rode away together, the latter carrying his red chip with him, as he said, smilingly:

"For luck."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE THREE VISITORS.

THE party of horsemen who arrived at Miner's Roost and put up at the Overland Lodge, were three in number.

One was Buffalo Bill, and the others were the Brothers in Buckskin, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill Powell.

They were gazed upon with considerable curiosity by the miners, for Buffalo Bill had been at once recognized by Landlord Jerry, who called him by name, and he then presented his comrades, whose fame was well known in all that region.

They engaged as good quarters as the Lodge could furnish, and then strolled about like men who had no real business there and were merely passing through the mining country.

The landlord called up several of the miners and introduced them, and, as the Red Buzzards' running off with Sunset Sam's coach was all the talk, the conversation turned upon that adventure.

The scouts listened attentively to all that was said, and expressed a wish to go to the parson's cabin and see the wounded man.

The parson was there as nurse, just then, and he received the scout pleasantly and expressed the belief that the stranger would pull through with life, but added:

"I very much fear his reason will be gone."

"What a great pity; but, can you find no clew as to who he is?"

"None in the least, Buffalo Bill," the parson confessed.

"The outlaws stripped him of his money, if he had any, and of every paper he had about him to tell who he is or ought about him."

"He is a gentleman, evidently, and has seen better days, poor fellow; but he came West to mine, without doubt."

"Then he was the game the Red Buzzards were after, you think?"

"Yes, beyond all doubt."

"It was a bold deed to capture the stage as they did."

"One of the boldest I ever knew, and done in sheer bravado, for they could have gone as passengers on the coach and obtained what they did on the trail without risk, for they would have held vantage over the driver, too."

"That is so; but, did not the miners pursue them?"

"There was no one to do so, as they made good their escape, and, night coming on, would have given them a long start. I trailed them to where they had had a comrade in camp with their horses, for they had planned well."

"Then you can follow a trail, parson?" suggested Cody, with a smile.

"Oh, yes, Brother William; I have had so much experience trailing sinners, you know."

"And what do you expect to do with that poor fellow?"

"He will be physically well very soon; but if he does not regain his reason, I will try and trace him back over his journey to find out who his friends are, that they may come after him."

"It is all that you can do, parson," decided Cody, and the three scouts left the cabin and returned to the hotel.

An hour after, when it was dark, the man who was to relieve the parson as nurse came to the cabin and said:

"I guess as how there'll be trouble over at the saloon to-night, parson."

"How is that, Brother Raleigh?" asked the parson quickly.

"Waal, I heerd as how some o' ther boys was goin' ter git Buffalo Bill and his pards inter a game o' keerds and work up a row, so as they could drop 'em, for they has it thet ther scouts is here as spies, meanin' no good to some o' ther boys o' Miner's Roost."

"They will make a mistake, for Buffalo Bill is chief of scouts at the fort, and barm to him will fetch the soldiers down upon Miner's Roost."

"That's my idee, parson, but they is bent on mischief, and yer can't argue with a fool."

"No more you can't," admitted the parson thoughtfully, and then he asked:

"Who are the peace-disturbers, Brother Raleigh?"

"Waal, Si Saunders is ther chief, and Lasso Dave and Nat Sykes is backing him up, with several others to stand by 'em if it comes ter a draw and let go."

"Si Saunders, Lasso Dave, and Nat Sykes—three of the worst sinners of my fold," sadly remarked the parson.

Soon after he arose, and leaving Raleigh as nurse for the wounded stranger, he wended his way down among the camps.

The night was dark, but camp-fires, and lights from the various cabins glimmered here and there.

The stores were still open and the Overland Lodge was in full blast, for in its saloon always gathered at night all the miners who knew not what to do with themselves.

There were a score of rude tables in the room, with men gathered about them gambling, and a long bar of rough logs, high as the chin of a man of ordinary size, extended clear across the saloon.

At either end was a narrow door, and the plan adopted had the look of a stockade fort, rather than a bar, and was doubtless intended to protect the dispensers of liquor from the mob, in case there should be a general row.

The "bar" was now attended by three rough-looking specimens of manhood whose appearance indicated that they would fight at the drop of a hat.

The bar on the inside looked like a ship-of-war's bulwarks, for there was a shelf on which stood many bottles bearing labels of what they contained, and on the floor were barrels from which to draw supplies when needed; but its resemblance to a vessel's bulwarks was in that all all along on brackets were repeating-rifles and revolvers, cocked and ready for instant use.

Tom-and-Jerry intended that his employees should have the protection which the law of powder and ball would afford.

CHAPTER XVII.

PARSON PAUL "CHIPS IN."

FULLY a hundred "citizens" were gathered in the saloon, when the clock over the bar struck nine, and which timepiece, with the experience of its predecessor as an example (for it had been used as a target, many times), was securely shielded by a barrier of stout boards.

Liquor was flowing generously; the clink of glasses was heard, mingling musically with the ring of gold on the tables, and the hum of voices arose and fell like the sound of breakers upon the shore.

The three bartenders were kept busy "putting up drinks," and making change, and the heart of Landlord Tom-and-Jerry was gladdened by the sight, for it meant more "rocks" for his pockets.

The landlord had escorted his guests, the scouts, into the saloon, and they had been quickly invited to play a sociable game of poker.

Night Hawk and Broncho Bill had declined, claiming utter ignorance of the fascinating intricacies of the national card game, but Buffalo Bill had been led into temptation by the remark of Nat Sykes:

"I kin beat any scout as ever run from a Injun or wore buckskin."

"As I have often run from an Indian, and wear buckskin, being also a scout, I'll go you, my friend, for a game or two."

"Just show up your pile and it's agreed," was Nat Sykes's rejoinder.

"I'll put up my stake, my friend, at the proper time."

"Has yer got ther lucre?"

"If I have not, I can borrow it; so, are you ready?" was the cool retort.

"Waal, I wants more in ther game, so who chips in among my pards, as yours is too scared to play?"

And Nat Sykes caught the eyes of Si Saunders and Lasso Dave, who said, quickly:

"I'm with yer, Nat."

"And me, too."

"They are the three worst men in the camps,"

whispered a miner, to Night-Hawk, while he added:

"Put your friend onto them."

"Oh, he has cut his eye-teeth; but I thank you all the same," answered Night Hawk.

Landlord Tom-and-Jerry also gave Buffalo Bill a warning look, but it was not heeded.

The scout had taken his seat, as if by accident, with his back against the wall, and Broncho Bill and Night Hawk assumed a stand on either side as though to watch the game.

The three roughs had intended taking that side, but Buffalo Bill was too quick for them and had the cards in hand when they sat down.

"Is that your pack o' keerds, pard?" asked Si Saunders, with a suspicious look.

"Why do you ask?"

"Waal, you is strangers in Miner's Roost, and we has been took in by sharps now and then."

"Well, get another pack if you suspect this one of being marked," Cody said, pleasantly, while those around wondered that he had not grown angry at the insinuation.

"Waal, I knows this ter be a clean pack."

And Si Saunders drew a pack of cards from his pocket.

"But I don't know them to be clean, so I'll order a new pack," said the scout, complacently.

"What! does yer doubt me?"

"See here, pard, do you wish to quarrel or play? for I took no offense at your accusation."

"Waal, I hain't a man ter quarrel, so let's play and call both remarks off."

"Very well; as you please."

And Buffalo Bill called for a fresh pack, and they were handed over.

The game then began, the three roughs watching the scout like hawks, while he was unruffled and indifferent.

Behind the three men of Miner's Roost had gathered a crowd, several of whom, as if by design, stood at the backs of the trio, and watched every movement of the scout.

Others in the room who were idle became lookers on, and as Buffalo Bill raked over the pile of money he had won, it could be seen that the sympathy of the crowd was not with Si Saunders and his comrades.

"You is a big bluffer," at last asserted Si Saunders, as Cody constantly raked in the gold, his bold playing fairly startling his adversaries.

"You have the same privilege, pard," he answered, quietly.

As Bill still continued to win, the three roughs grew uneasy, and showed it. They had expected to play with marked cards and to pluck him, after which they would pick a quarrel, which was meant to end in his death, and the death of his comrades, for Si Saunders had all of his gang about him.

"If yer wins another game, Buffler Bill, I'll understand that it hain't luck, for yer has raked us all in for considerable dust."

"You should not play for money if you whine when you lose."

"Whose a-whining?"

"I thought you were."

"Waal, yer thought wrong; but I'll know what it is if yer wins again."

"Well, I win, you see, so what is it you would say?"

"That yer is a infernal card-sharp!"

Quick as Buffalo Bill was on a draw, he had not expected instant trouble, and so the desperado had him cornered, his revolver, which he had had in his lap being leveled full in the face of the scout.

Buffalo Bill's face did not even change color while he said in the evenest of tones:

"You've got me cornered, pard, and no mistake. Now what do you want, for I know when I've met my match?"

"I wants yer ter count out every dollar yer has won from us three and give it back. Do it quick, too!"

"Up with yer hands, Brother Saunders, gun and all, and do it quick, too!" suddenly rung out in the deep voice of the parson, and a revolver in his hand covered the desperado to whom he gave the order.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FIGHTING SATAN WITH FIRE.

THE situation was a startling one in the Overland saloon, and wholly unexpected to all, for no one had seen the parson enter.

What was more to the point, no one had expected that he would "chip in" when there was a life-and-death scene impending.

Buffalo Bill had lived too long on the border to throw his life away by an act of foolhardiness when a desperate man had him covered with his revolver.

Had there been other lives at stake then the scout might have taken chances; but there was nothing more at stake than for him to let the brave and his band rob him of the money he had won in a square game, where they had intended first to rob him and then kill him.

He knew that at his side stood two tried friends and true, in Night Hawk and George Powell; that, if Si Saunders killed him one of

the Powells would surely send a bullet through the bravo's heart; but, that would be poor satisfaction for Buffalo Bill, so he accepted the situation as it was, intending to play his trump cards later in the game.

If he had had his revolver in hand, as had Si Saunders, he would have taken the chances of a duel with him; but now there appeared upon the scene no less a person than Parson Paul, who was there with a demand which his revolver enforced.

There were men at Si Saunders's side and back who had their eyes on the Powells, and a shot from either of the brothers would have been the signal for a desperate revolver duel; but neither Nat Sykes nor Lasso Dave dared "raise the turn," as they called it, by turning their guns upon the parson.

There the parson stood, cool as an icicle but in deadly earnest, his hand as steady as a rock.

"Yer hain't a-goin' back on me, is yer, parson?" whined Si Saunders, completely taken aback by the situation.

"Will you obey me, Brother Saunders, or shall I pull trigger and pray for your soul afterward?" was the stern rejoinder.

"Up goes my grippers, parson," cried the desperado, as he raised his hands over his head, one of them holding a revolver.

The instant he did so Cody took advantage of it to draw his weapon, and the situation seemed to be gaining in interest.

"Now, Brother William, take the money you squarely won."

"Hold on, parson, fer I hain't to be brow-beat out o' my dust by you," shouted Nat Sykes, and he was bringing his hand up, a revolver in it, when from the parson's left gleamed a second pistol and he found himself covered.

"See here, Brother Sykes, you and your sinful pards had better go, or there will be graves to dig to-morrow for all of you."

"As it's you, parson, I'll go, but no other man c'd drive me away from this saloon," growled the ugly Sykes. "Only I don't believe in fightin' a preacher any more than I w'd a woman."

"Especially when the preacher has the drop on you, Brother Sykes," suggested Parson Paul with a smile, and loud laughter rung out from the crowd, who saw that the Pistol Parson was master of the situation.

"Hain't yer goin' ter let up on me, parson?" demanded Saunders, who still held his hands over his head, for the revolver in the parson's right yet covered him.

"Yes, go with your pards, and lose no time." Saunders turned and walked away with the others, and all heard him say something in a low tone.

Instantly the desperate trio turned, and a wild cry of warning arose:

"Look out for 'em!"

"They mean to open fire!"

Men sprung in every direction, knowing the deadly danger in standing before those three revolvers, for Si Saunders, Nat Sykes, and Lasso Dave had played that same game before.

Every man in the room who had drawn a revolver replaced it, believing all trouble over; but, somehow, the parson had his in his hand, and he stood between the scouts and the three desperadoes.

That the vicious trio meant to kill Buffalo Bill and the Powells, all believed, and yet only one man seemed quick enough to stop the tragedy.

That man was the parson! His revolver rung out three times in less than two seconds.

Shrieks and a heavy fall followed. Si Saunders had dropped, a bullet in the center of his forehead, while the revolvers they held fell from the hands of Nat Sykes and Lasso Dave, for the arm of each had been shattered by a ball!

A deathlike silence followed, and now every man had a weapon in his hand awaiting the result.

But the parson poured oil on the troubled waters with the remark:

"Brother Sykes, you and Brother Lasso Dave were drawn into this trouble by the deceased Si Saunders, whom I was forced to take out of this life, I fear for a worse one."

"I will now be pleased to dress your wounds, and to-morrow arrange for the burying of your lamented friend. The three of you meant to kill, and so I had to fight the devil with fire. You received just what you would have given. Shall I look to your wounds now?"

The two men stood cowed and frightened, for at their feet lay the man who had led them on, and come there with the avowed purpose of taking the lives of the three Government scouts.

They suffered from the shock of their wounds, and were glad to have the parson care for them, knowing his skill, and that no one else was near who could help them.

So they humbly sought his aid, and followed him from the saloon, which fairly shook with the wild cheers for "The Dead-Shot Parson."

CHAPTER XIX.

SPIRITED AWAY.

To say that the miners were amazed at the turn affairs had taken would but half express their feelings, for they were wonderstruck.

Generally, in the Roost, when there was

shooting done, the innocent were the sufferers, the guilty being the victors and getting the best of every affair of the kind which they invariably brought on.

The trio who had been so summarily checked in their mischief had "painted Miner's Roost red" on many an occasion, greatly to the regret of the better element of the camp.

They were known to be desperadoes, and many a deed of lawlessness was laid at their door, though the proving it was no easy task.

They had been particularly severe toward strangers, and there were a number of graves in the little cemetery of men who had been wantonly shot down by Si Saunders and his pards.

The better element regretted to see Buffalo Bill drawn into a game with the three desperadoes, but all were glad to see him so cleverly worsting them, and the game was appreciated as the roughs were not playing with their marked cards.

When the parson appeared upon the scene it was a surprise, and it was feared that he would be set upon by the trio, for they were known to have others to back them, and many an honest hand fell upon its revolver to be drawn in Preacher Paul's behalf.

But the fighting parson had needed no aid; his cool courage and deadly aim surprised all present, and cheers followed him as he went out with Nat Sykes and Lasso Dave to repair the damage he had done them, while he had arranged to decently bury the body of Si Saunders on the following morning.

Such kindness on his part was duly appreciated by the wild element of the Roost, and the parson was voted "a trump keerd" to play against any hand.

The cabin wherein Nat Sykes and Lasso Dave dwelt was some distance from the saloon, but the parson showed no hesitation about going there with them and with the others of their immediate followers who went along to be of service, as they said.

"I'm gittin' powerful weak, parson, and guess as how I am a-bleedin' ter death," stated Nat Sykes, as they neared the cabin.

"Maybe so, Brother Sykes, for the way of the transgressor is a hard road to travel; but we will soon know, though I don't think either of you got more than a flesh wound. I shot only to graze the bone, not to break it."

"Here, pard, you run back to the saloon and get a bottle of brother Jerry's best, but don't drink it all on the way back."

The man addressed dashed away on his errand, and soon after the cabin was reached.

By the time the hunting-shirts were taken off and the wounds exposed, the man returned with the liquor, and the parson gave both of the wounded men a stiff drink; then, with a basin of water he washed the blood away, and made an examination, after which he observed:

"It is as I thought; the bone is not shattered, merely grazed—see, here is the bullet, Brother Sykes!"

"Keep it as a warning, for it could have gone through your heart just as surely, had I intended it; but I spared you two and dropped our late Brother Saunders."

"I'll see to you now, Brother Dave."

The bullet was also taken from the wound in Lasso Dave's arm, and then the parson dressed them with the greatest of skill and care, after which he took his departure.

Returning to the Overland Saloon he was told by Landlord Jerry that the scouts had retired, so after a short talk with Jerry Thomas, who praised his conduct in the saloon, and warned him to keep his eyes open for danger to himself, as Si Saunders's band would seek revenge, he walked slowly toward his own cabin.

It was not very long before he was back again, and Jerry, who was just about to retire, saw that something had gone wrong.

"Brother Jerry," he said however in an unmoved tone; "wake those three scouts, and call out as many of your best men from the saloon and bring them at once to my cabin."

"But, parson, what the dickens has gone wrong?"

"Do as I tell you, and you will find out," and with this the parson walked rapidly away.

He ascended the steep path to his cabin and pushed open the door, which was unlocked.

He then paced to and fro in the little room, his brow clouded, as could be seen by the lamp swinging over the table, until he heard steps outside.

"Come in," he said, as he beheld the landlord, the three scouts, and a trio of the best men in Miner's Roost.

"What's gone wrong, parson?" asked one of the miners.

The parson pointed to the cot where a form lay.

"Is the stranger dead?" asked Jerry.

"Do you not see that it is not the wounded stranger, Brother Jerry?"

The landlord sprung to the side of the cot and cried out:

"Great God! it is Raleigh!"

"Yes, Brother Jerry."

"And he's dead?"

"Yes, there's a knife-wound in his breast."

"Then the stranger has killed him and fled, for I don't see him here."

"The stranger did not kill him, Brother Jerry, though he is not here," calmly rejoined the parson.

"Then where on earth is he?" cried one of the miners, while the scouts stood in silence, seeing and hearing all that passed.

"When I came here, Brother Jerry, I found poor Raleigh dead, and the stranger gone. I, too, suspected the stranger of killing his nurse, until I found in Brother Raleigh's hand this paper."

Then he read aloud:

"WARNING!"

"As Parson Paul thwarted us in our game to get possession of Yankee Dan, the gold-hunter, we have now come for him, as he possesses a secret we wish to know, after which he shall die."

"Let the parson be warned that he too is marked for death by

"THE RED BUZZARDS OF THE BORDER."

CHAPTER XX.

KNOWN AT LAST.

THE communication, written in lead-pencil, in a bold hand, and read aloud by the parson, was a surprise to all. It told where the stranger had gone, how he had so mysteriously disappeared, and more, it showed that the outlaws were a desperate, cruel lot, to have come right into the camps and do what they had done.

A short while before they had run off with Sunset Sam's coach, in broad daylight, before the eyes of a hundred men.

Now they had come by night into the camps and taken off bodily the wounded man whose life had been saved by the parson's skill and the devoted nursing he had received.

That they had spies in the camps, who could guide them to the parson's home, was certain, or else they knew Miner's Roost but too well.

Poor Raleigh, acting as nurse, had been killed and placed upon the cot of the stranger, as though with the hope that his body would be believed to be that of the man kidnapped; but the keen eye of the parson had detected the truth, and his first act was to see if Raleigh had been mortally wounded or not.

He saw that he was dead and so went to the Overland Lodge.

"His body is still warm, so he cannot have been long dead, and if such is the case then the outlaws cannot be very far away, especially as they carry a captive," the parson said.

"But, their trail cannot be followed at night," one of the miners remarked.

"They could go by but three trails, and a party of mounted men could follow on each of them," declared Jerry Thomas.

"True, and we must start them at once, for there are half a hundred horses in the camps at least."

"My pards and I will take one of the trails, if the parson here will serve as our guide," Buffalo Bill remarked.

But the parson returned:

"No, my duty is here, for there are dead to be buried, Brother William."

"Very true," responded the scout, and then he continued:

"But the wounded man was referred to as Yankee Dan the Gold-Hunter?"

"Yes, do you know him, Brother Cody?"

"I knew a man by that name some years ago. He mined alone and was a fearless fellow; and, now that I recall him he did not look unlike the wounded man; but his hair was not gray, then, and he wore it long, and also a full beard."

"I remember that he came to the fort and gave warning of an Indian raid. The commandant then said his name was Daniel Darwin, and that he lived some miles from Fort Edward in New York State."

"I recall this as I afterward struck his camp and he was gone, but he had cut into a tree the words:

"I found my fortune here."

"DANIEL DARWIN."

"Then there was a date which I have now forgotten."

"I thank you, Brother Cody, for this news, for I shall write at once to the postmaster of Fort Edward making inquiries regarding the man."

"Now, it would be well to get off, if you are going. I should advise that you take the ridge trail with your two comrades, and I will start you well upon it."

This the scouts decided upon, and they were off within fifteen minutes, with Parson Paul as guide, while it was over an hour before the two miners' parties got mounted and away.

Just at sunrise the parson returned and reported that the scouts had struck the trail of the Red Buzzards, so that messengers were dispatched to call the miners back, and all were content to leave to Buffalo Bill and his comrades, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill, the trailing of the daring outlaw murderers and kidnapers.

As the coach would come through from Hard Times that day, the parson's first duty was to write a letter to the postmaster at Fort Edward, making inquiries of him regarding Daniel

Darwin, known upon the frontier as Yankee Dan, and giving the particulars regarding the wounding, carrying off, and probable death of the miner.

The miners who had started on the hunt for the outlaws returned, tired out and disappointed, late in the evening, but this disappointment seemed greater on account of their having missed the double funeral of Si Saunders and Raleigh, and not having seen the parson perform the sacred rites with befitting dignity and good-will.

The rougher element showed their regard for Si Saunders dead to be greater than for him living, and they were a critical band, too, trying hard to think that the parson had slighted the remains of their pard, and honored those of Raleigh the more.

But they had to admit that he showed no partiality for the "remains," singing just as sweetly for both, and not leaving out an Amen for Si Saunders, which he had put in for Raleigh.

"I kinder thought as how he were a-goin' ter slight poor Si, and ef so I was thar ter take it up," remarked a burly ruffian after the burial.

"Waal, it were dif'rent with me, for I thought as how he'd be more partial ter ther stiff he hed pervided fer ther funeral; but he were squar' ter both and sent 'em off on golden pinions, did ther parson," another had responded.

"Waal, pards, Si hev gone on his last trail, and it are our duty to do by him as he would by us, drink full in honor o' his goin'."

This proposition was unanimously agreed to, and forthwith they proceeded to carry it out.

Both Lasso Dave and Nat Sykes had been conspicuous at the funeral by their absence, but the parson had returned from the cemetery by the way of their cabin and told them how well all passed off, while he again dressed their wounds for them with the skill of a surgeon, which brought forth the remark from Nat:

"Waal, you be a dandy, parson, and no mistake, and I guess poor Si will rest well arter the services yer bestowed upon him."

"The community certainly will," dryly assured the parson, but neither Nat or Dave saw the point.

Days passed, and Buffalo Bill and his comrades sent in no word of having tracked the kidnappers to their lair, and as Miner's Roost had too many sensations to remember any one event long, the stranger who had been spirited away by the Red Buzzards had been almost forgotten.

But there was one who had not forgotten him, and that one was the parson, for at last a letter had come from the East containing information regarding Yankee Dan, the Gold Hunter. This letter was followed, soon after, by an arrival at Miner's Roost whose coming created a decided sensation.

CHAPTER XXI.

SCOUTS ON THE TRAIL.

SOME days after the bold act of Captain Kit Quantrel, in running off with Sunset Sam's coach, a horseman was riding alone through a wild and rugged valley.

He at last came to a halt near a spring, and gazed about him with the air of a man who was searching for something.

Dismounting he quenched his thirst at the spring, gave his horse a drink and staked him out near, while he stood gazing about him.

He was of attractive person, with an athletic, wiry form, broad shoulders and a military carriage, yet quick in his step and movements.

His eyes were as piercing as an eagle's and as bright, while his face, cast in a stern, resolute mold, was one to give confidence and show indomitable courage and will-power.

Dressed in buckskin leggings stuck in top-boots, he wore an undress uniform jacket and gray sombrero, while in his belt were a pair of revolvers and at his back was a rifle.

His horse was an able animal and well equipped.

The man was Captain Jack Crawford, and he was on his rounds to see if word had been left at any of the places designated by Buffalo Bill, by the Surgeon Scout, from whom not a word had been heard since his accepting the duty of playing detective upon the Red Buzzards of the border.

"This is the only one of the five I have not visited—yes, and yonder is the stone described," and so saying he climbed up the wall of rock overhanging the spring to where lay a loose rock, evidently having fallen from the cliff above.

"Ah! here is a letter," he cried, as he tipped up the rock and beheld beneath it a slip of paper.

It was addressed to no one, but was not sealed and read as follows:

"The Red Birds captured a coach a few days ago, wounded passenger and escaped.

"Come to the Roost, but not in force. Will meet you there."

"Now I must get back to the fort with all speed," and so saying Jack Crawford mounted his horse and rode away.

Fort Venture was an advance post, far from civilization and the barrier against red-skin raids and too much lawlessness in the mines.

But the force was inadequate for the work expected, for it would have taken a couple of thousand soldiers to accomplish what the Secretary of War at Washington had ordered less than two hundred men to do.

These were a couple of companies of infantry, a section of artillery, one company of cavalry, a few hangers-on about the post, and, fortunately for the safety of all, Buffalo Bill and a score of splendid scouts, some of whom the reader has already met.

But for these heroes in buckskin the fort would have been wiped out of existence by the Sioux, while wagon-trains going westward would have been ambushed and destroyed.

It was fifty miles from Hard Times, and so remote that mails came but seldom.

And yet the gallant pards of the Scouts' League were wont to ride at will through the perilous country, and it was just what Jack Crawford did when he went on the rounds to see if Surgeon Powell had left a letter.

The Surgeon Scout had been gone so long without sending any word, that Buffalo Bill and all were becoming anxious about him.

But then in came Jack Crawford with his letter, found at the spring, and it was eagerly read by the chief of scouts, who said at once to Captain Jack:

"Jack, you follow to-morrow with ten of the men, and camp at the spring, in case I should need you."

"I'll be there, Bill," answered Jack Crawford, and with the two Brothers in Buckskin, as the Powells were often called, Buffalo Bill set out for Miner's Roost.

They arrived, as the reader knows, but failed to find Surgeon Powell.

They dared ask no questions regarding him, and when the kidnapping of Yankee Dan was discovered, they started upon the trail of the outlaws, guided by Parson Paul.

But they did not go blindly, as Parson Paul soon revealed a lantern, and a close examination of the trail showed that five horses had gone along that way.

The parson knew the ridge trail well, so put out the lantern and led on until the valley was reached.

Here his lantern was again lighted and the trail discovered and its direction noted.

"They have gone down the river, and there is no ford for many miles, so you are safe to follow until dawn."

"There are five tracks, as you see, but one horse was doubtless brought for the stranger, so you have four men to fight, unless they have a larger force awaiting them somewhere near, which you must look out for."

"You are right, parson, and you talk more like a scout than one who has followed Gospel trails only."

"But I have to thank you again, for your services to-night in my behalf, and I rather like your style of weeding the sinners out of your flock."

"If your religious arguments are as straight to the point as you shoot, then you must corral converts by the score."

"I talk as I shoot, Brother Cody, straight at them; but I must be on my way back now, for I have two funerals on my hands in the morning, you remember?"

"Yes, I remember," dryly said Buffalo Bill, and with a grasp of the parson's hand all round the scouts mounted their horses and rode away in the darkness, following the river-trail, while the fighting preacher wended his way back toward Miner's Roost.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LOST TRAIL.

UNTIL dawn the three scouts went silently on their way, hardly once speaking and not wishing to have their approach heard, should the outlaws have halted in their flight.

The coming of dawn showed them that they were on the right trail, for there were the tracks of five horses.

"They will hardly believe pursuit can start before dawn, so we have the advantage, Night Hawk, as we are over twenty miles on the trail," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, and by hard riding may come up with them within an hour or two, for I do not believe they had over that length of time the start of us," Broncho Bill remarked.

"Let us first go into camp and get breakfast, giving our horses an hour's rest and a chance to feed; in fact, two hours would be better, as we could catch some sleep, and we have the day before us."

This proposition of Buffalo Bill was considered a wise one, so a camping-place was found, the horses watered, unsaddled and staked out, and in a few minutes the scouts had a cup of coffee and ate their frugal breakfast of cold meat and bread.

Then they laid down to rest, but in just one hour awoke, so trained were they in controlling their senses when asleep even.

Soon after they were mounted and again upon the way.

"Well, Bill, what do you think of that strange parson?" asked Night Hawk George, after awhile.

"He's a dandy, isn't he?"

"Yes; but what do you think of him?"

"I hardly know; but he surely fights the devil with fire, and is the most muscular Christian I ever crossed the trail of."

"He is, indeed, and you heard how he had gone after the Red Birds who ran off with the coach?"

"Yes, and he carries his revolver and Bible in the same bag, I take it, for, though he does not keep either in sight, the weapons certainly turned up when wanted, and three quicker shots I never heard, while his bullets went just where he wanted them," Broncho Bill said.

"Yes; he shot to kill that fellow, Si, and to wound the other two, and he was just in the nick of time, for if he had not done what he did there would have been a dozen men dead in that saloon in a minute more, and one of us, perhaps all, would have turned up our toes."

"I tie by the parson, pards," Night Hawk said, feelingly.

"So do I," joined in Broncho Bill, while Buffalo Bill added:

"I'm fairly stuck on him, but I can't make him out."

"He's no howling missionary from the back-woods, for he is educated and as toney as an army cadet, while he goes forth with fire and sword, so to speak, to slay the Philistines that crowd him too hard, and ropes in the miners with a lariat."

"He might pass for a professor in a theological institute, with his black suit, gold spectacles and clean-shaven face, while in a scrimmage he is as chipper as Satan with spurs on."

"Did you notice what a trailer he was?"

"Yes, Broncho, I did, and he was as cool about the discovery he had made in the cabin as though it were an every-day affair to find a dead man in his bed."

"I tell you, the parson is just my style of man, but here we are at the ford," and Buffalo Bill drew rein where the trail of the outlaws led into the river, which was a deep, swift-flowing stream a hundred yards or more in width.

Just at the ford there was a bar running obliquely across the river, and here the water was not stirrup deep; but upon either side the ledge it was fully ten feet in depth.

The scouts carefully reconnoitered with their glasses every nook upon the other shore.

That the outlaws had crossed there their tracks plainly showed, and if they meant to ambush their pursuers, that was the very place to do it successfully and with less danger to themselves.

Each of the scouts had a glass, and dismounting they took various positions and reconnoitered the other shore.

At last they felt convinced that the outlaws had not halted there, and so they rode in at the ford and followed the bar across.

There was a sand island in the center, and here they saw the tracks of the outlaws' horses, and also the footprints of heavy heeled boots, showing that the outlaws had made a halt there.

But on they went, and were going out upon the other shore when Buffalo Bill drew rein and came to a sudden halt, while he gave a low whistle of surprise.

"What is it, Bill?" asked the Powell pards in a breath.

"Show me the trail, that is all."

Both Night Hawk and Broncho Bill gave exclamations of amazement, for they saw no trail.

"They did not come out here."

"That is certain."

"Where, then?"

"There is not another ford in ten miles."

"But they could have swum their horses down-stream a short distance and made a landing."

"Yes, Broncho, and we must find where they did land."

"Perhaps they went back and covered their trail as they rode out of the river where they entered it," suggested Night Hawk.

"We must find that out," was Buffalo Bill's answer, and after convincing themselves that the outlaws had not come out of the water there, the scouts returned to the other shore.

But not even with the hoofs of their horses muffled could the outlaws have again left the river there, and the three scouts stood in a quandary, not knowing what course to pursue.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OUTWITTED.

THE three scouts being at fault, regarding the trail, halted for a consultation.

They gave their horses the benefit of the halt to rest and feed, by unsaddling and staking them out, while on foot they examined every foot of ground as only skilled frontiersmen knew how to do.

No three better trailers could be found on the plains, and this they modestly admitted to themselves as they went to work to solve the mystery.

They bent every energy to the task, and at last became convinced that the outlaws had gone down the river, their horses swimming.

So, while Buffalo Bill and Night Hawk took each a side of the river on foot, Broncho Bill rode down the trail along one bank, leading the horses of his comrades.

He made his way slowly along, keeping pace with the others in their search, and an occasional hallo from one or the other marked their progress.

Thus several hours slipped away, and the scouts had thoroughly searched every foot along the banks for a distance of ten miles from the ford.

"What luck, Night Hawk?" called out Buffalo Bill, from his bank of the river.

"There is not a single spot where a wolf could get ashore, let alone a horse," was the answer.

"The same on this side, but I'll keep on down to the ford, searching as I go, and you do the same, while Broncho goes ahead to have dinner for us and give the horses a longer rest."

"All right; I'll get there in two hours, if it's but ten miles more," answered Night Hawk.

So the search was begun again, and Broncho Bill rode on at a pace which carried him to the lower ford in little over an hour.

He found a splendid feeding ground for the horses, and then set about reconnoitering his position to see that there was no foe near.

This ford was a grand one, saddle-skirt deep, and below it, as above, the banks were rocky and precipitous.

As the shadows began to lengthen Buffalo Bill arrived quite tired after his long search and loss of rest, and soon after a hail came from the other shore, and Broncho Bill rode across and brought Night Hawk over.

Broncho had a good camp-dinner awaiting the tired men, and, having dispatched it, they began to talk over the search.

"There is no trail here at this ford," Broncho Bill said.

"And but one spot on my bank where a landing could have been made, and it surely was not done there," Buffalo Bill responded.

"And not a place on my shore where a horse could get out," added Night Hawk.

"Well, Kit Quantrel must have led that kidnapping band himself, for he has the name of being the cleverest dodger on the border, and always covers up his tracks."

"But how does he do it, Buffalo Bill?"

"Who knows? for he's ahead of me."

"He surely came to the ford."

"Yes."

"And entered the river there?"

"True."

"There is no boat on the river?"

"None that I ever heard of."

"It would be impossible that there should be, and what use, except in this very case, would he have for one?"

"I do not believe he has a boat; but an idea strikes me of how he could have dodged us."

"What is it, Bill?"

"He could have left his horses back on the trail, going to others awaiting him at another point."

"Well?"

"And one man could have taken the five animals on."

"Yes."

"And entered the river."

"That they did do."

"We saw a man's track on the sand island, and it seemed as though a halt had been made there, and my idea is, for it's just about what Kit Quantrel would do, that the fellow cut the throats of the horses and let them float on down the river."

"Bill, I believe you have it."

"It's about the only plan I see to solve the mystery of the lost trail," Broncho Bill said.

"The man could have come ashore barefooted and made no trail, and I believe that was Quantrel's game, for what would he care for the horses?"

"True, I guess you have hit it, Bill; but what are we to do now?"

"We'll seek a safer camping-place for the night and go to-morrow where Jack Crawford and his boys are, and see if any of them can suggest a plan to pick up the trail of the Red Birds."

This plan decided upon the three scouts went to a safe camp for the night, and were glad to seek their blankets.

The night passed without a disturbance, and at dawn they were up, wholly refreshed, and having breakfast, started for the rendezvous at the spring.

Jack Crawford and his men were there, and the situation as it was, was placed before them, and as no one could hit upon a more likely solution than Buffalo Bill's idea, that the outlaws had deserted their horses and sent them on with one man to kill them, this was looked upon as just what had been done.

"Any news from Surgeon Powell, Jack?" asked Bill.

"Not a word, and I returned from the rounds just before you came in, having started yesterday."

"I hope no harm has befallen him."

"Did he not meet you at Miner's Roost as he said?"

"No, Jack."

"That looks bad, for the surgeon never breaks an appointment or his word; but what shall we do now?"

"We can do but one thing and that is to return to the fort and await news from Doc Powell, for the Red Buzzards have certainly outwitted us, pards," responded Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PARSON'S LETTERS.

It will be remembered that the parson received a letter regarding Daniel Darwin, about whom he had written to the postmaster near where the miner's home was said to be located.

The miners wondered that Buffalo Bill never reported his trailing of the outlaws, forgetting how readily they had given up the pursuit.

The fate of the stranger they did not know, and many did not care; but it was generally believed that Quantrel had put his man to death.

The mail brought in one day by Sunset Sam contained a letter for the parson, and it was quickly taken up to his cabin by Landlord Jerry.

The parson eyed it as though it was an uncommon thing for him to receive a letter, but at last said:

"It is from an attorney in New York."

Tom-and-Jerry started at this, like a man with a guilty conscience who wished nothing to do with lawyers.

"It's nothing about me?" he said, with a troubled look.

"No, Brother Jerry, it's from the lawyer of the man whom the outlaws kidnapped."

"Oh!" and Jerry looked relieved.

Then the parson read his letter.

It was dated three weeks before, written in New York, and read as follows:

"REV. PAUL PRIM:—

"DEAR SIR:—Your letter to the postmaster at Fort Edward was forwarded to me to respond to, and I hasten to do so.

"I note all that you say in regard to the arrival of my client, Mr. Daniel Darwin, who, I recall, once told me that he was called, upon the frontier, by the name of Yankee Dan.

"My idea of the stage-coach attack upon Mr. Darwin was to secure from him maps of a mine which in my opinion he went out to work, though this is only surmise on my part.

"He certainly did dig a fortune in gold out of a mine, and half a year ago lost it all by the failure of two banks so closely allied to each other that when one closed its doors the other followed its example."

"This left Mr. Darwin with a little money in the village bank near his home, and which he set aside to the credit of his ward, a young lady whom he brought from the West with him nearly five years ago, and who is completing her education at a school on the Hudson River, graduating in a couple of months more.

"Mr. Darwin also has his farm on Lake George, which is rented in shares, the rental also being deposited to the credit of his ward, Miss Mohawk."

"The second attack upon Mr. Darwin, when he was spirited away from your cabin by outlaws, goes further to prove that they believe they can wrest from him the secret of his mine; but if, as you say, he has lost his reason through the wound he received, he will doubtless be killed as soon as they discover the fact that his mind is gone.

"Poor fellow, I could wish for a happy fate for him, as he is a noble man, and has known so much of sorrow in the past.

"His will, left with other papers in my keeping, leaves his farm, his money, and all else that he may possess, to his adopted daughter, Miss Mohawk."

"I shall communicate with her at once, telling her the sad story your letter tells, and stand ready to give into her keeping her legacy when it is assured that Mr. Darwin is dead, which I very much hope is not the case, though, should his reason be irrevocably gone, it would be better so, perhaps.

"You having been so kind as to take an interest in my unfortunate client, I am going to ask of you to still further confer a favor by setting on foot every means in your power to discover if he be dead or alive.

"If dead, I must have good proof of the fact, and if alive and a captive to a merciless lot of outlaws, you may offer a reward of five hundred dollars for his rescue.

"I would that I could offer more, but little more than that sum of his money is now in my hands; but I will expect to have it doubled by Miss Mohawk when she learns of all the circumstances, and will at once write you.

"For the reward, and other expenses you may have been to, or falling upon you, I will express the amount to you by Overland as soon as I hear from you what the sums may be.

"Thanking you for your great kindness to my client, believe me, my dear sir,

"Yours obediently,

"WILLARD WESLEY."

This letter the parson read carefully through, and then he and the landlord talked it over together, and they could only arrive at one conclusion, and that was that the outlaws knew just what had brought Daniel Darwin West, and had laid in ambush to entrap him.

Physically he was well again, though weakened; but when they discovered his mind was a wreck, unless they believed he was shamming, the parson thought they would kill him, as he would be a very troublesome person to keep in their camp.

When the next mail came in it brought another letter for the parson.

This, too, was from the lawyer, and the parson's brow clouded as he read it:

"MY DEAR SIR:—

"I at once communicated to Miss Mohawk the sad news contained in your letter, told her what I had done, and asked her to offer a thousand dollars more as a reward.

"I have never seen the young lady, but her letter astounds me, for she simply says that she will offer no reward and forbids me to do so, and if her adopted father is dead, she will discover the fact in good time.

"Permit me therefore to say that your personal expenses in this matter I will pay, while from my own purse I will offer two hundred dollars as a reward for knowledge of him, dead or alive, if you deem that incentive enough to set any one to find out.

"I have the honor to be, etc., etc."

"The heartless girl," said the parson, as he finished reading the letter.

Then he added:

"I fear they have killed the poor fellow; but we will know in time, as the girls say—but what is all that row in the camps?" and the parson hastened down toward the Overland Lodge where a large crowd had gathered.

CHAPTER XXV.

GO-WON-GO'S GRIEF.

"SHE reminds me of the pictures I have seen of Pocahontas."

So said a distinguished visitor at the fashionable Young Ladies' Seminary which Go-won-go, the Red Butterfly, attended.

Her face was a dark, healthy red, but her features were perfect, her carriage stately and her every movement graceful.

Her milk-white teeth shone with brighter luster in contrast to her red complexion, and her eyes were very large, lustrous and full of expression.

Dreamy they were, almost sad, but they would enkindle with a fire that seemed to burn when she became excited, or rather had cause for excitement, for outwardly she was ever calm under all circumstances where calmness was needed.

Her form was willowy, yet very strong, and she could run like a deer, and leap like one over barriers that men would not have readily ventured.

Dressing ever neatly, she bound her long black hair in braids about her head like a crown, fastening them with an ivory comb.

This was the only ornament she wore except a diamond solitaire ring upon her left hand, a gift from Daniel Darwin.

Go-won-go had met rebuffs at first, for there were girls who did not care to associate with "an Indian."

But she had passed them unheeded, ever having a bright smile for those who treated her with kindness, and getting her revenge upon one young lady who had sneered at her as a "red-skin squaw," by jumping into the river one day and saving her life, when she had fallen off of the end of the dock, where she was fishing, and at the very time she lost her balance making ungenerous remarks about Go-won-go, who was coming toward the group of maidens gathered there.

There were screams, and shrieks for help, but not one dared spring over to the aid of the fast-drowning girl, though many there could swim.

"It is Delia Harrison, Go-won-go," cried one of the girls as the Indian maiden ran up to the spot.

Go-won-go looked down into the deep, clear depths and caught sight of the white face beneath the waters.

In an instant she took a "header," and a wild cry went up from the girls as they saw her rise with Delia Harrison in her arms.

"You must not struggle, or you will drown us both," they heard her say, and a few moments after they reached the steps on the side of the wharf, and ready hands drew the half-drowned girl up to safety and bore her up to the house.

Meanwhile Go-won-go quietly swam ashore, as though enjoying her bath, once she was in for a ducking, and landing, made her way to her room to soon after reappear with dry clothes on and thinking nothing of her brave act but much of the grim revenge she had felt, for the Indian in her nature would exert itself.

And Delia Harrison smothered her pride and before the whole school begged Go-won-go to forgive her many unkind acts toward her; but in her heart she hated the Indian girl before she owed to her her life.

When the session was half passed there seemed no doubt in the minds of the students as to who would carry off the honors.

"Go-won-go will get all the prizes and stand first," said one, and not a dissenting voice was heard.

It was a joy to the Indian girl to feel that she would carry off the honors, for she had worked to that end.

An Indian among pale-faces, she was determined to show her adopted father that she could prove their equal if not their superior in their studies.

They studied for an education, and she for the

honor of feeling that one of a hated race could win when the test came.

"Yes, I will get the honors I know, and in a few more months I will receive my diploma," she said as she sat in her room after study hours one rainy afternoon.

"And what after I have graduated?"

"I do not know; but I shall go to the farm and await my dear father's return, and I know he will soon return with a golden fortune for us; but it is strange that I have had no letter from him since he reached the terminus of the railroad—ah! there come the letters now."

She saw the post-boy of the school coming across the lawn, and soon after in the corridor the names of the girls who had letters were called out by the mistress.

"Miss Go-won-go Mohawk!"

"Here!" and the Red Butterfly received her letter and hastened to her room.

"Why, it is not from my father," she said, with a look of disappointment.

She broke the seal, and what she read brought her white teeth together with a snap.

She arose and stood erect, her bosom heaving convulsively, while she held the letter clutched tight in her hands.

Like a bronze statue she stood for long minutes, gazing out into the pitiless rain, her eyes fixed on vacancy.

Other girls would have cried out, moaned or fainted away at what she had read, had they been in her place; but she uttered no cry, no moan, and suffered in silence, not a tear dimming her eye.

At last she spoke, and her voice was very calm:

"I cannot believe that he is dead; but dead or living, this is no place for me now."

"No, my place is there."

"I will offer no reward, and so will I write this lawyer."

"I will ask no one to find him if alive, or to find his grave if dead."

"I will do it."

She was silent for a moment, and then resumed:

"What are honors to me now? I must go and recover him, or avenge him!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MYSTERIOUS YOUTH.

"Who is ter ride with me on ther box?"

The question was asked by Sunset Sam, as he came out to mount to the box of his coach and start upon his long run of thirty hours, with two three-hour rests, for the time was not very fast out to Hard Times, as the trips were semi-monthly.

"I am," came the response, and out of the dingy hotel on the trail came a youth upon whom Sunset Sam's eyes were at once riveted.

He was an Indian, beyond all doubt, for that his red complexion and long jet-black hair showed.

He was dressed in a suit of black, the jacket being trimmed with silver buttons, and the outer seam of his pants, which were stuck in the high-top cavalry boots, were also fringed the same way.

He wore a blouse shirt of silk, with broad collar, and about his waist was a crimson sash, in which were stuck a pair of handsome, gold-mounted revolvers and a bowie-knife with carved handle.

His hair fell upon his shoulders, and his form was slight, elegant yet athletic.

Upon his head he wore a black sombrero, enriched by a silver cord, while in front was beautifully embroidered a red butterfly.

His hands were covered with gauntlet gloves, a riding-whip with gold handle hung from his belt, and golden spurs were upon his heels.

"Waal, I'll be eternally scorched if that hain't a Injun dandy from Red-skin Ranch," said Sunset Sam as he caught sight of the Indian youth.

Then he added:

"And it is ter ride with me?"

"Waal, if he pays his money he has ther right."

"Come, Mr. Red-skin, git up if yer goes with me, for I are a minute late in startin', seein' as I were tuk all aback at seein' yer."

The youth with a spring reached the box and took his seat.

"Nimble as a catamount," muttered Sunset Sam, and he started on his journey.

The youth calmly sat by his side, making no remark, and Sunset Sam was the first to break the silence.

"What may your name be, young Injun pard?" he ventured.

"I am called Red Butterfly."

"Be you, now?"

"Well, you look it."

"Look like a butterfly?"

"Waal, you is as gay as one; but fine feathers don't always make fine birds."

"For instance, the Red Buzzards?"

"Ah! you has heard o' that nest, has yer?"

"Yes, often."

"You doesn't live in these parts?"

"No, I'm a timberfoot from the East."

"I'd have mercy on yer, then, out in this

country, fer yer must be one of them Injuns as acts in theater plays."

"Not exactly, though I have come West to act in a drama."

"See here, young pard, ef yer takes my advice, yer'll ask me ter draw up and git down and walk back, catchin' ther first stage goin' east on the main line o' ther Overland, fer this are the honerarest country man ever seen."

"But I prefer to go on."

"Is yer afeerd o' road-agents?"

"Well, I have to be tried by seeing them to find out."

"It's likely yer'll git tried, then."

"You expect to meet the road-agents, then?"

"Waal, I'll tell yer thet they has a idee I has a rich freight on this run, which I hasn't, of course, and more than likely it will be a case o' hands up afore we reach Miner's Roost."

"What will you do?"

"I'll put my hands up only too sudden."

"And they will rob you?"

"Yas, and the coach, if there was anything to take; but they'll salt you, too, young red-skin."

"I will be sorry."

"So will I, if you has got much dust along."

"I have a few hundred dollars in gold, if that is what you call dust."

"That's it, and you'd better try and hide it."

"No, I'll take the chances of their finding it; but have stages often been robbed on this line?"

"Has they often been robbed?"

"Waal, now, they often is, and, what's more, I'll show you a place, if you live to see it to-night, in Graveyard Canyon, where a coach was held up one rainy night, the horses kilt, and the driver, too, while every soul inside was massacred."

"You don't say so?"

"I do, and some say as how they has seen a phantom stage-coach and passengers a-rolling along through the canyon on moonlight nights; but certain it be that there was a freshet that awful night, and the trail was overflowed by the river, and that might have swept off the coach and bodies, for the trail bordered the stream; but not a horse, wheel or one o' that party ever were seen afterward."

"What became of them nobody knowed until a Red Buzzard was captured and h'isted by the Vigilantes, and he told all about it."

"That was terrible."

"It were so terrible the Red Buzzards got scared at their own act, and there hain't any of 'em but believes that the Phantom Coach travels the trails at night."

"Still they keep up their red work, though they won't hold up a coach in the exact same place as the one that was wiped out, yet does do it further along."

"And you think they may halt us to-night?"

"I feel mighty shaky about it, I kin tell you."

"I don't wonder, as you have a paymaster's box aboard with fifteen thousand dollars in it."

Sunset Sam started and looked at the Indian youth in utter amazement.

At length he was able to ask:

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"Yer is mistaken."

"I am not, for you have under this seat a false box, and in it is a small iron box belonging to the Overland paymaster who is waiting for the money up at Hard Times."

"Young Injun, again I asks yer who you is?"

And Sunset Sam looked disturbed in mind, while the quiet response came:

"And again I tell you that I am called Red Butterfly."

CHAPTER XXVII.

RED BUTTERFLY HAS SOMETHING TO SAY.

THE utter amazement upon Sunset Sam's face brought a smile to the face of the Indian youth.

His eyes, however, were carefully watching the driver, as though suspecting him of trickery.

The youth had read him aright, for Sam felt firmly convinced that he had a spy of the Red Buzzards to deal with.

If so, he knew that the Indian would be quick to note any hostility on his part, so he said, quietly:

"Waal, you surprises me, red pard, for I didn't think nobody but me and the superintendent was onto that racket of the secret box."

"But I must water my horses at the drink, yonder, so hold the ribbons, please."

And Sam nodded toward a stream that crossed the trail just ahead.

He handed over the reins at the same time, as though to get down, but put his hand behind him, when, still holding the reins in his left, the right of the youth came up and a derringer looked squarely into the eyes of Sunset Sam.

"Don't draw, for I have you covered!"

"Waal, ef yer hasn't I'm a thousand liars rolled inter one, and yer has 'arned the money fer gittin' the drop on Sunset Sam."

"I don't wish the money, for I am no robber; but I saw that you intended to draw on me, so I anticipated you, that was all."

"Then yer hain't a Red Buzzard?"

"I am a Red Butterfly, I told you, and butterflies are not dangerous, you know."

"Waal, you kin show claws in great shape, when yer hev a mind ter; but what is yer racket arter all?"

"To save your money from the road-agents, for they know just where it is."

"Does you mean it?"

"I do."

"But how?"

"How did I know?"

"That's so; but yer reaches clean over me."

"Well, I tell you that they know as I do, from having overheard your plan with the manager to have this double box put on the coach."

"And you heard it?"

"I did."

"When and where?"

"I was in my room in the hotel, and after I put out my light two men entered a room next door, and I heard them talking about getting on to what plan the manager of the Overland line and Sunset Sam was putting up to head the Red Buzzards off on some money that was to be sent through."

"One said there was a knot-hole in the floor, and he lay down flat with his ear to it."

"Then I saw a glimmer of light through my floor, and I put my ear to it."

"You and the manager were in a large room below, and you planned to hide the gold-box in a false box in the seat of your coach."

"Those men heard the same, and I overheard them plan to notify their chief, and head you off in what they called the Phantom Coach trail."

"I dressed myself quietly to knock at their door and capture them; but they had gone out so noiselessly that I had not heard them, and so I missed them; but I concluded to make the run with you and come back for my horses."

"See here, pard, is you an Injun?"

"Full-blooded."

"Waal, yer has heap more sense than pale-faces I knows thet sets up for knowin' it all, and yer has grit too, or yer'd never attempted ter bag them two men alone—only a man o' great sand or a durned fool would do that."

"Well, Mr. Sunset Sam, I believe I can save your money for you."

"Now do you?"

"Yes."

"As how, pard?"

"While at the place we started from, and I was there some days, I heard stories told of the Overland Trails, and all admitted that the Red Buzzards would not hold up a coach at night, since the one they wiped out, unless they knew it to carry big tooty."

"They are awful superstitious about that affair, and I heard one man say that a lot of miners had started the report about the Phantom Coach to scare them off, and it had been very successful."

"Waal, they don't go for a coach at night, I admits, since that awful affair, and the Red Buzzards as has been tuk prisoners, afore they was hanged, all admitted they was sorry they had been in that affair, for four wimmen was kilt that night and a leetle baby too, along with two old men and old Jack Sloan the driver, and the outlaws got no money arter all."

"Then I has heard thet Quantrel can't sleep o' nights 'cause his conscience is that bad, and I don't wonder, young pard."

"Nor do I; but cannot the military keep these outlaws off the trails?"

"The soldiers does all they can, pard; but they has more than they can do watchin' the infernal red-skins—begging your pardon, for you is such a fine young gent I clean forgot yer was a Injun."

"There is no harm done, my friend, for I know well that my people are a wild, cruel race, and go often upon the war-path."

"But the pale-faces seem to forget that we were born in savagery, and it has been our teaching from infancy to kill our foes, and what worse foes have the red-skins than the whites, for they take our lands from us, beat us back toward the setting sun year by year, rob us and shoot us down, and when we strike back then they crush us in our might, and forge the steel chains around us still stronger."

The youth had seemed to suddenly forget himself, his calm demeanor, in brooding over the wrongs of his people, and had spoken warmly.

Sunset Sam was not only astonished, but impressed by the youth's words and manner, and said earnestly:

"You talks Gospel truth, Pard Butterfly, and I knows it, fer I has eyes and hain't a born fool."

"There's my hand on it, pard, that Sunset Sam is your friend, and that hain't no idle boast."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AS PHANTOMS.

THE Indian youth seemed to appreciate the friendship of Sunset Sam.

What had at first appeared to look like ill-feeling between the two, turned out just as each one desired, for Sunset Sam was a good reader

of human nature and saw that he had no ordinary personage on the box with him.

Who the youth was he could only hope to find out, but that he was one to tie to Sam was assured.

That he was an Indian was what puzzled Sam.

He could have expected anything of a pale-face, even had he been a boy, but for an Indian to talk, look and act as he did was something which the driver could not get through his head.

After they had shaken hands as pards, Sunset Sam was silent for some time, and the youth did not break the silence.

The driver was cogitating about his new-found friend, and recalling the fact that the youth had said he intended to help him out of the difficulty.

"Now how can he do it, for them road-agints mean bizness every time.

"I might bury the box ontill another occasion, but then I don't know as that would do.

"I'll ask him."

And from his musings Sam broke in with:

"Young pard, can you see any way to git by them Red Buzzards and still keep the box o' dust?"

"I think I can."

"I'm with yer, if yer says ther word."

"Woat do you say to playing the Phantom Stage-coach?"

"Playin' ther what?"

"The Phantom Stage-coach?"

"By Jupiter, but I be afeerd we'd run across the coach itself maybe."

"You are superstitious, then?"

"I believes in ghosts at times, and at other times I doesn't."

"It depends on ther time o' night, how far I am from a buryin'-ground, and ef I am alone or in company."

"Well, my plan is to make a phantom out of the coach and horses."

"Yas."

"You never drive white horses, I believe?"

"Haven't one on ther run."

"Well, I believe there was no one on the box with the driver the night the coach and its passengers were wiped out."

"No, only the driver."

"What time will we reach the canyon where the tragedy took place?"

"Just after moonrise."

"Good! that will show us off well."

"See here, Injun Pard, what be you after?"

"Just this: to go through as the Phantom Coach."

"They'd tumble to it."

"No, I think not."

"Maybe we might fool 'em, but how I can't git onto."

"I'll tell you."

"I wishes yer would, pard."

"When I decided to come through with you, I decided upon a plan, and I'll tell you what I did."

"I went to the store and got some white muslin, and had four horse-covers made, going over the head and neck, and also leggings to draw on."

"Then I cut out some covers for the coach and wheels, and had some narrow pads made also."

"Pads?"

"Yes, to tie around the wheels and deaden all sound."

Sunset Sam gave a low whistle, and the Indian continued:

"I also had mufflers made for the feet of the horses, and to tie on firmly, and they will make not the slightest sound with their hoof-fall."

"Lordy, oh, Lordy!" said Sam, with delight and wonder combined.

"Then I got two white suits and some flour, to whiten our faces with, and I want to tell you that I am a ventriloquist—"

"A what?"

"A ventriloquist."

"What tribe o' Injuns is that, pard?"

"Oh, you do not understand."

"I mean one who possesses the power of imitating voices and sounds and making them sound far off—see?"

"Halt! Hands up, Sunset Sam!"

"Lordy! they has got us," and Sam hastily drew rein.

The Indian youth laughed and said:

"I did it, Sam, just to give you a sample of what I can do."

"Pard, I'm gittin' onto yer racket."

"You is a leetle wonder and no mistake," and Sunset Sam was lost in admiration of his young comrade.

"Now I can get in the coach, with a white sheet around me, and you can whiten your face also and put on the ghostly rig I have for you."

"Then we can sail along through the canyon, and my word for it not a Red Buzzard will bother us, in fact they'll stampede if they see and hear us, for I shall shriek like a madman, yell murder, and make them believe the coach is full of ghosts."

Sunset Sam burst forth into loud laughter, while he said over and over again:

"We'll scare 'em ter death!"

"They'll die! they'll die!"

Then the Indian youth unrolled the bundle he had with him, and Sunset Sam was delighted at the ghostly raiment he beheld.

"Ther horses will be dressed up in petticoats, and what a show we will make."

"I only wish we was thar now and every road-agent on the Overland were in the canyon a-waitin' for us," and Sunset Sam again grasped the hand of the Indian youth, in his great joy at the prospect before him of frightening the Red Birds half out of their wits by the clever plan which the Red Butterfly had proposed to save the coach from robbery.

And on without adventure they traveled until at last the canyon was reached, just as the moon rose and Sunset Sam drew rein with the remark:

"Now we'll make our twilight as ghosts, Pard Butterfly."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE KIDNAPPERS.

THE escape of Captain Quantrel and his two comrades, when they left the coach, was as clever as their deed had been bold in running off with the stage from the very door of the Overland Lodge.

Captain Quantrel had planned to take the coach, with his two companions, when it came through, Gold Brick George having reported that it was to go through to Hard Times on that run.

He expected to capture the passenger, Daniel Darwin, handcuff him, and with a revolver at his head force him to go with him.

He would have called a halt from Sunset Sam, if he had not discovered what was going on inside, just when the coach had halted, and having examined the plan of escape over the cliff, by aid of the lariats, he decided to go that way.

Before Sam could drive back to the Overland Lodge and give the alarm, they could be far away.

But the reckless devil in the man's nature caused him to suddenly form the idea of running off with the coach while Sunset Sam was at the bar.

How well he carried out his plan is already known.

The moment he halted the coach he heard of the death of his victim, and this hurt him deeply, strange to say.

But there was no time for delay, and the three men, keeping the coach between them and the parson in pursuit, slid down the lariats into the canyon.

The lariats were drawn after them, and one of the men coiled it as they ran.

They lost no time in getting out of sight, and after a run of half an hour, keeping up a good pace, they came to a ridge which they ascended to the summit.

Just as dark came on they turned into a narrow canyon, and here they found a small camp.

There were two men there and half a dozen horses, evidently awaiting their coming.

"Come, men, we must get out of this, for by dawn we need to be far away from Miner's Roost," said the outlaw chief, sternly.

In ten minutes they had mounted, and one horse was being led, for it was the animal brought for Daniel Darwin.

Suffice it to say that the chief returned to where he had left his band, covering up his tracks well, in case he should be pursued.

His camp was a temporary one, for he might move at any time; but Kit Quantrel always made himself comfortable while encamped, if only for a day.

That Yankee Dan had had no papers upon him, and had been killed, as he believed, the chief seemed to deeply bemoan until one day one of his spies rode into camp and reported the exact situation at Miner's Roost.

At once Captain Quantrel determined to kidnap the wounded miner, and he laid his plans well.

He knew all the attending dangers, and that a hot pursuit would doubtless follow, and he sent a dozen of his men to prepare the way according to his directions.

That they did so well, the throwing of Buffalo Bill and the Brothers in Buckskin off the trail was the surest proof.

A spy sent to Miner's Roost gave him full particulars as to where the wounded miner was located, and the way of approach and retreat.

With but three companions he rode along the ridge, left their horses muzzled, and reached the rear of the cabin.

Captain Quantrel was anxious to find the Parson there, toward whom he felt most revengeful; but instead, Raleigh was acting as nurse, and he sat at the table, his head resting upon his arm, asleep.

From that sleep he never awoke, as the knife of Quantrel entered his heart.

The wounded miner lay upon the cot, not asleep, but watching the intruders with a vacant stare, devoid of all interest.

Even when he saw the death-blow given to poor Raleigh, and beheld him sink upon the floor he did not move or utter a word.

"Come, get up and follow me."

"If you utter a cry I will kill you!"

So commanded Kit Quantrel, and his revolver covered the heart of the wounded miner.

Daniel Darwin simply obeyed.

Not from fear of the revolver, but because he was told to do so.

His manner was listless, and he stood watching the chief while the three outlaws held him covered.

"Place that body in the cot yonder, while I write a line to the parson," said the chief.

And two of the men did as ordered, while Quantrel wrote what the reader has seen.

Then, sticking it up over the head of the dead man, he turned and left the cabin, having slipped a pair of steel handcuffs upon the unresisting wrists of the wounded miner.

Back along the ridge they went, to where their horses were left, and, mounting, rode silently away.

Not a word had the kidnapped man spoken.

He had mounted his horse when told to do so, though not without aid, for he seemed weak, and the lariat about the animal's neck was held by Quantrel himself.

Several times did the outlaw chief address Daniel Darwin, but no response came, and he gave it up, little dreaming that the man had lost his reason, for that his spy had not reported to him.

And so on to the retreat of the Red Buzzards the kidnapped man was taken, unthinking, uncaring whither he went.

CHAPTER XXX.

PUT TO THE TEST.

THE retreat of the outlaws was some forty miles from Miner's Roost and located in a wild canyon where no one would ever think of going, unless it was a gold-hunter or a scout looking for human game.

There was an egress at the head of the canyon by a narrow chasm among the rocks through which poured a shallow torrent from the mountains above, and, once gaining the ridge beyond, one man could have defended the pass from a score.

Captain Kit was always happy in his selections of his retreats, for, though often pounced upon, it was invariably when the outlaws had flown.

Had they been there, the sentinels always kept on duty would have given timely warning of the approach of an enemy.

To strike his tents, pack them on large, sure-footed mules, send them off under a guard, and with his fighting squad stand ready to protect his rear on the march, was the work of a few minutes.

When danger threatened, Captain Quantrel invariably retreated to the fastnesses of the mountains, and when again heard from was far away in another direction.

He ruled his men with a rod of iron, yet never allowed them to want for food or clothing, cared for them with tender nursing when ill and wounded, buried them decently when slain, and never exposed them to danger without cause.

Then, too, he divided liberally with his men, and was so devoted to their interest that he endeared them to him, while he was so severe if they neglected a duty or disobeyed orders that they stood in awe of his anger as they did of death.

His field force numbered twenty fighting-men, while he had half as many more in camp, and half a dozen spies along the Overland, in the fort, settlements and mining-camps, so that he was well posted as to the movements of gold-dust, valuable-freighted wagon trains, coaches and passengers who carried booty.

The retreat of the outlaws to their camp I will now follow, but that they covered up their tracks most thoroughly has been seen.

The dawn found them in camp, and the prisoner was given a blanket in the chief's tent, where he at once lay down to sleep, for he appeared weak and fatigued.

It was noon before Captain Quantrel aroused himself and ordered breakfast, and then called to his prisoner to get up.

Daniel Darwin obeyed, and the irons were transferred from his hands to his feet, with a ball and chain attached, so that escape was impossible with the watchful eyes in camp upon him.

He submitted quietly and sat down to breakfast in silence, eating sparingly.

After the negro servant of Quantrel had removed the breakfast-table, which, like the other camp furniture, folded up for packing for the march, Quantrel lighted a cigar, and said:

"Make yourself comfortable, Mr. Darwin, for I wish to talk with you."

"Yes," and the prisoner stared vacantly at his kidnapper.

"You take your capture most coolly, my friend."

"Yes."

"You have obeyed so well, and been so good, I don't quite understand it."

"Yes," and still that vacant stare.

"Do you remember where we have met before?"

The hand was passed over the wounded head several times and then came the low response:

"No."

"We have met though."

"Yes."

In spite of himself Kit Quantrel began to grow nervous.

That vacant stare and the docile manner worried him.

"Yes, in our lives we have often met."

Again the hand passed over the forehead.

"Do you not remember?"

"I have no memory—now."

"It is all gone," he said in a pitiful tone.

"Well, you do act the fool in a way that would make your fortune on the stage," sternly said the chief.

"On the stage—I was hurt on the stage—see here," and he pointed to the wound in his head.

"See here, Darwin, I know that you got a severe blow on your head from one of my men; but I do not believe it has destroyed your reason, so no more acting with me."

"I don't remember."

"You have got to remember what I wish you to."

"Yes."

"You went away from this country with a fortune, which was saved to you by the head chief and his daughter, and you dealt me a hard blow then."

"Had I known who you were at first I would not have attacked you, or I think I would not; but I found it out afterward."

"There are reasons why I should not harm you, why I should treat you well, as you know."

"I don't remember."

"Well, in spite of your idiotic talk I know that you understand me, and I will tell you just what I wish."

"You went East with your money and I suppose squandered it."

"I don't remember."

"You took the Sioux chief's daughter, and I suppose she told you about her father's mine, and now you have come back to find it."

"From rumor it is a very rich mine, and if you will go shares with me, you can go there and work it; but if you do not, then I shall keep you a prisoner here until a given time, when, if you do not guide me to that gold-mine, I will put you to death."

"I don't remember," came the quiet response.

"Well, I shall give you a certain time, and then it will be to tell me or die."

"Yes," and Daniel Darwin smiled as sweetly as a child into the face of the man who put his life at stake.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE OUTPOST.

CAPTAIN BENTEN, a gallant cavalry officer, was in command of what was known as Fort Venture.

In military parlance it was an advanced outpost, with four of the branches of the service represented, the engineer corps, cavalry, light artillery and infantry.

Even to that dangerous position the wives and daughters of officers had ventured, for the women of the army are plucky, and will risk what their husbands, fathers, lovers and brothers dare do.

The outpost had been selected by Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, who had been sent out to find a place which could be defended by a small force against many, and could not be readily starved out and cut off from water supplies.

They had selected well, a wooded hill in the shape of a beehive, cut through the center by a foaming torrent dashing over rocks.

There was timber in plenty, and nature had done much to fortify the place, as a string of boulders like a necklace surrounded the hill.

In the valleys on either side was the juiciest of grass, and the situation commanded the country for miles around.

The advance guard had first thrown a swinging bridge across the stream, which ran a hundred feet below, and this was made firm enough to cross a horse upon, or a cannon.

Then the timber cleared from the base of the hill up to the encircling boulders formed a stockade-wall and built cabins, while the refuse was piled up for firewood.

Thus was the outpost made into a strong fort, and the fear that it could be taken by ten times its number of Indians never entered the mind of one who beheld it.

The officers' quarters formed a line on one side of the stream on the hilltop, a railing having been placed to guard the children from going over, or a belated and befogged officer or soldier at night.

The men's quarters were across the bridge, and there were platforms upon which were run the four guns, two twelves and two sixes, when needed to defend the place.

The horses' stables and cattle-sheds were protected from flying arrows and bullets, if they had to be driven into the stockade, and windlasses and buckets on either bank furnished water in case of a siege.

In this fort dwelt some three hundred souls, all of whom knew well that hundreds of miles lay between them and perfect safety, and that

hostile Indians constantly moved along the trails leading to the Overland trains, mining-camps and settlements.

But Captain Benteen was a fearless soldier, knew that his advance-post had a wholesome dread upon the Indians, and his scouts and cavalry were constantly upon the move to keep down any outbreak that threatened in force, though the red-skins were constantly on the war-trail.

When Buffalo Bill and his scouts returned to the fort, the chief of scouts went at once to headquarters and reported to captain Benteen.

That dashing, handsome officer, the hero of many a frontier fight, was seated in his pleasant quarters reading the mail which had just come in from Hard Times, where a courier went for it every two weeks.

"Well, Cody, back again, I see."

"Sit down, for I wish to have a talk with you," said the captain, pleasantly.

"Yes, sir; and I have come to report the result of my trip."

The captain tossed his last letter aside and said:

"Well, I'll hear what you have to say first."

"I went, sir, with the Powell brothers—"

"Ah! then Surgeon Powell has turned up?"

"No, sir, I refer to his brothers, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill."

"And the surgeon?"

"I have no news of him, sir, since his letter asking me to come to Miner's Roost and he would meet me there."

"You told me of it."

"Yes, sir."

"You went?"

"I did, sir."

"Was he not there?"

"No, sir."

"This is strange."

"Yes, sir, for Surgeon Powell never breaks an appointment."

"So I know, and his failing you this time would suggest that harm had befallen him."

"He is so wide awake, sir, such a splendid scout and so brave, that I have always confidence in his turning up all right."

"I sincerely hope so, for he fills a most important place here on the frontier, as surgeon, scout and my aide, and he surely is invaluable."

"You remember, sir, I told you how he drew the red chip in the drawing of lots as to who should go upon this trail?"

"Yes, and he was more pleased to draw the red chip to go than a white chip to remain."

"No doubt of that, sir; but he went, and I have had but that one letter from him."

"Then it is time to be anxious."

"It seems so, sir, and yet, as he is the man, I am most hopeful."

"Were it others I might feel more anxious, Cody, I admit; but Powell has a great, big, level head, and is a match for any man who wears boots or moccasins."

"Still an ambush can take off any man."

"That is what I fear, sir; but I received his letter, brought me by Jack Crawford, who makes the rounds of the places we fixed upon for the leaving of communications, and with the Powell brothers I went to Miner's Roost."

"And he was not there?"

"No, sir."

"And you have heard nothing since?"

"Not a word, sir."

"Has Jack Crawford been the rounds of late?"

"He has just returned, sir, as I rode into the fort, and found nothing."

"This looks bad indeed for Powell," said Captain Benteen, anxiously.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CAUSE FOR ANXIETY.

THAT both Captain Benteen and Buffalo Bill were more anxious about the Surgeon Scout than they would acknowledge, there is no doubt of.

Frank Powell, though surgeon, was more fond of scouting than anything else, and he was constantly on the go when his duties did not keep him at the fort, such duties as he could not leave to the assistant surgeon.

He was a most successful hunter and fisherman, and kept the tables of his friends well supplied from love of the sport.

He had been through so many hair-breadth escapes that men had begun to regard him as one who bore a charmed life, and he was ever so courteous, generous toward all, from the highest to the lowest in rank, that he was more popular than any man in the fort.

That his career had been a strange, thrilling romance all knew, and that his life had been tinged with sorrow was known as well, and he was regarded as a mystery even by his best friends.

When he had gone forth upon the mission for which he had drawn the lot, it had been given out in the fort that he was going to have a leave, and so no one, other than Captain Benteen, several officers and the members of the Scouts' League, knew what a perilous mission the Surgeon Scout was upon.

So matters stood when Buffalo Bill returned from his trip to Miner's Roost.

In a few words he told the captain of all that had occurred there, the running off with the stage-coach by Kit Quantrel and his two comrades, and the wounding of the passenger, Daniel Darwin.

Then followed the story of the scene in the saloon of the Overland, in which the parson had also taken such a prominent part.

"By Jove, Cody, I must get that parson made chaplain of this post, for he's just the kind of man we want."

"Why, he'll bulldoze the men into psalm-singing and prayer," said Captain Benteen.

"He's a dandy, sir, and I never saw a better shot, for he toppled that desperado over with a bullet in the dead center of his forehead, and hit the other two in the arm to knock their revolvers out."

"I enjoyed his nerve immensely, sir, and as for a trailer, he knows it all."

"And you say that this devil Quantrel kidnapped the wounded prisoner?"

"Yes, sir, while we were in Miner's Roost."

"He found the man he had left in the cabin as nurse dead in the cot of the wounded miner, the latter being gone, and the placard which Quantrel had kindly written the parson."

"But it made no impression upon Parson Paul, who got a lantern and set us on the trail, which as I said, we lost at the river; but how they covered up their tracks I do not understand, nor does Night Hawk or Broncho Bill either."

"Well, if you and the Powells could not solve the mystery of the lost trail there is no need for others to try."

"But, Cody, we must have that parson for chaplain."

"I wish we could, sir, and I asked him to keep his eye open for any lawlessness when he could be of service."

"That was right; but now for what I wish to talk to you about."

"Yes, Captain Benteen."

"The mail that has just come in was brought by two couriers."

"Yes, sir."

"One was killed just out of Hard Times, but his horse ran back with the pouches, and the second man came in wounded, fired on from an ambush."

"I will scout the trail at once, sir."

"Yes, but we can hardly spare scouts as a patrol for the trails, and certainly we cannot keep soldiers on such duty."

"I have applied for more men several times, reporting how hard my force was worked; but I am told to get along as best I can and I must do so."

"But you know, Cody, that we must keep our eyes on the red-skins, and let the outlaws have full sway, and it is the band of Quantrel of course that is holding up trains and ambushing our mail couriers."

"I have had such trouble to get men to make the ride that I now ask for volunteers, and pay well."

"Of course you know, Captain Benteen, that any of the Scouts' League will go."

"Very true, Cody, but I cannot spare my scouts for mailservice, as you are all needed for other work constantly, and it is a soldier's duty as couriers; but if another man goes under, I will either have to keep the trail under patrol, or send off for some riders who will risk life for big pay and not connected with the army."

"I can get you the men, sir, if you have to go outside the army for them," said Buffalo Bill.

"Well, if this constant ambushing keeps up, I shall have to get you to do it, and I know you will get men who can be trusted, while the very fact that they take the ride is more than proof of their courage."

"Now let us see what is to be done about poor Powell."

"I can go on a scout after him with some of my men, if you wish, sir."

"No, I cannot spare the scouts from the lines between here and the Indians, and you have no more than you need for the service."

"We will wait for a few days, and then have Jack Crawford take the rounds of the letter stations again, and if nothing is heard from him then, I will send you out with Lieutenant Amos Andrew and a squad to look through the mining-camps and settlements to see if aught can be heard of him; but, did he give you no hint as to where he was going?"

"No, sir; he simply rode off on the duty, and his letter to meet him in Miner's Roost was all I have heard of him."

And it was very certain that both commandant and scout were most anxious about Surgeon Powell.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE OUTLAW SPY.

GOLD BRICK GEORGE, who had brought the information to Captain Kit Quantrel of the coming of the miner, Daniel Darwin, back to the mines, was the best spy in the band of the Red Buzzards.

He was one who worked diligently at some-

thing while on spy duty, and made friends where he could.

The idea of suspecting him of being secretly an outlaw people who knew him would have represented the thought.

He had met the spy whose duty it was to go from point to point, gleaning such information as he could get, and then carrying it to the chief.

Gold Brick George at once told him of a discovery he had made to the effect that the Overland paymaster was to send a batch of money through on a certain date.

When, therefore, the agent came to the place where Gold Brick was, and put up at the hotel, the latter and the courier spy made their arrangements to learn what was to be done in the matter of carrying through the strong-box.

The courier spy had a room right over the superintendent's, and he bored a hole through the flooring and put in a cork, for such a thing as plaster was not known in the Overland lodging-houses in those days.

They planned well, and heard the plot, but little dreamed that they were also being plotted against by the Indian youth in the next room to them.

So Sunset Sam and the superintendent had the false bottom made in the coach-box, in which to conceal the iron strong-box of the paymaster, and congratulated themselves upon having outwitted the road-agents this time at least.

But the courier spy went on his way to his other stations, while Gold Brick George, who was known to be a great hunter, mounted his horse for a week of sport, he said, after big game.

But the "big game" Gold Brick George was after was the iron box concealed so cleverly beneath the false bottom of the driver's seat on the coach.

He made his way at once to the retreat of the Red Buzzards, but found that they had gone.

But this did not trouble Gold Brick George in the least, for Captain Quantrel never left a camp without leaving news of where he was gone for any of his men, or spies, who might come in after his sudden departure from a retreat.

This was done by a thorough understanding with all, that they should find the spot where the chief's tent had stood, and seek the nearest large tree to it, where, up on the top of the first branch, would be found, fastened by a pin on the top of the limb, a statement giving full facts.

This, when read, was to be returned to its place for the next man who might come along in search of the band.

The "notice" was always placed so as to be reached by a man on horseback, and Gold Brick George took in the camp, picked out the tree naturally to be selected, and found there the information he sought.

That night, soon after dark, he rode into the camp.

The chief was there looking over some letters one of the men had robbed a Pony Rider of, and seated near, listless and looking into the fire where the negro was getting supper, was the prisoner, Daniel Darwin.

The chief saw the approach of Gold Brick George, and glanced fixedly at the prisoner.

He knew that they had met in the past, that it was his spy who had recognized him at the stage station, and thus enabled him to entrap him.

So he wished to see if Yankee Dan recognized him.

Straight up to the fire walked Gold Brick George, and called out:

"Hello, Yankee Dan, the chief has you as a guest I sees."

The prisoner looked up, and without the slightest start or change of expression, said simply:

"Yes."

"Don't you know me, Yankee Dan?"

"I don't remember."

"If that fellow is shamming, then he is a wonder," muttered Kit Quantrel, as he called to Gold Brick George to come into his tent.

"Waal, cap'n, I'm here ag'in," he said.

"And you always bring me good news, Gold Brick."

"I've got gilt-edge good news this time, chief, and no mistake; but what's the matter with Yankee Dan?"

"He's my prisoner."

"I seen the ball and chain, sir, and so concluded he were not visiting you of his own free will, while it came along the line how you captured him; but he didn't know me."

"Don't you think he pretended not to?"

"No, chief, for he don't look exactly right to me."

"It may be that the blow he received turned his reason, but I doubt it, and yet he is the most consummate actor I ever saw if his mind is not gone."

"Now to the news you bring, Gold Brick?"

"Well, sir, I've got news that will just make you shout with joy, for I'll put you on the trail to get fifteen thousand dollars in crisp banknotes belonging to the Overland Company."

"By the Rockies! but this is good news, Gold Brick, and your information shall be valuable to you."

"Now tell me all about it?" and the outlaw chief took up pencil and paper ready to jot down the information received from his spy.

CHAPTER XXXIV. LYING IN WAIT.

THE news brought by his spy certainly pleased Captain Quantrel immensely.

Fifteen thousand dollars was something to make a great effort to get possession of, and it would be a prize worth risking life to secure.

"I suppose I have got to fight for this treasure, Gold Brick?" he asked.

"No indeed, sir."

"You don't mean that it will come right into my hands?"

"About that, sir."

"Well, tell me of it."

"It is to go through on Sunset Sam's coach."

"When?"

"In two days."

"Where is the best place to strike him from this point?"

"I would suggest the Death Canyon, sir."

The chief started visibly, and but for the glow of the camp-fire falling upon his face it would have been seen that he paled considerably.

"Don't you think so, sir?" asked Gold Brick, as the chief made no reply.

"Yes, if you go with us."

"Me, sir."

"Yes, why not?"

"But I must get back to work, sir."

"I thought so, as soon as I suggested that you should go to the Death Canyon with us; but you propose it for us."

"I don't like the place, captain."

"No more do I."

"But I suggested it, sir, as I know the Patrols will be up and down the trail about that time, going over all but the Death Canyon."

"He will pass through by night of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"And will have passengers?"

"I don't think so, sir, for the travel is very light westward just now; but I did hear of an Injun passenger."

"An Indian?"

"Yes, sir."

"A red-skin ride in a stage-coach?"

"Well, sir, this red-skin is a dandy."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know, sir, more than that he rid inter our place and put up at the hotel."

"An Indian at the hotel?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he a missionary?"

"No, sir, he is a dandy, handsome as a picture, a mere boy in years and just as trim built as a gal."

"He came in on horseback, and with two pack animals; but I did hear as he was going to run up to Hard Times in the coach with Sunset Sam on his next trip."

"I'm a-guessin' he's a pony rider lookin' for a job; but who'd trust a Injun?"

"Well, he must be a queer fellow from all accounts."

"But you think he will be a passenger with Sunset Sam?"

"Yes, sir."

"And no one else?"

"I didn't hear of any one, sir, and as I said, travel is light just now workin' westward."

"Now to the money?"

"Waal, sir, Sunset Sam will have it."

"No guard is to go along?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure, for the company generally patrol their coaches that carry money."

"They are patrolling ten trails now, sir; but they have played clever to git this through."

"How is that?"

"The manager and Sunset Sam put their heads together, and planned to fix up a scheme on the coach that has been in the shop and goes out on its next run lookin' new and gaudy."

"You see they put a false bottom in the box seat, and made the space beneath just the size of the strong box of the paymaster of the company."

"Aha!"

"His box is about six inches high, two feet long and a foot wide, and it will just fit in between the false bottom and the real one."

"The space is all padded to make it ride easy, and the false bottom raises up and screws down, so any one looking in would think it the real bottom of the box, as they would if they looked underneath also."

"This is a great discovery of yours, Gold Brick."

"Yes, sir, and by catching Sunset Sam at night, for it is moonlight, you can get the whole business and find out what the Injun is after, too."

"Very true; but since that awful night the men are afraid of the Death Canyon, and you know what silly stories are afloat about a phantom coach having been seen there."

"Don't you believe it, chief?"

"Of course not."

"The men do."

"Some of them are superstitious enough to believe such nonsense."

"Say, cap'n, I kinder believes 'em myself, for I has heard men at the station talk, whom I'd believe under any circumstances, and they has said what they has seen, and I don't want to get the chance to see what they has, so if you'll excuse me, I'll light out for the station again in the morning."

"I'll excuse you, Gold Brick, for you are too valuable a man to be frightened to death by a ghost; but supper is ready, and I wish you to tell me just what you think of Yankee Dan."

Later in the evening, after Yankee Dan had picked up his iron ball, petting it as though it was a little child, and gone to his bed, the chief and Gold Brick George had another talk, and the spy told Quantrel that he felt convinced that the prisoner had lost his reason.

"Well, I've given him his limit," said the chief, sternly.

The next morning the Red Buzzards, thirteen in number, and led by their chief, were on the trail for the Death Canyon, where they would lie in wait for the coming of Sunset Sam's coach with its valuable treasure concealed in the box beneath the driver's seat.

CHAPTER XXXV. THE PHANTOM COACH.

THE outlaw robbers sought to select a place of ambush as far as possible from the scene where they had before brought such an appalling tragedy upon the coach and all with it.

Resisted by the passengers, they had poured in a fire that killed men, women, children and horses alike, and yet they got no booty on that awful night of storm.

It was true that they knew that all their victims did not die outright, for as they fled away in the darkness from the fatal spot, they heard the shrieks of a woman ringing in their ears, and the bitter wailing of a child, with the deep moaning of a man.

Those sounds rung in their ears long after that fearful night, and it was no wonder that they dreaded the fateful scene.

It was true that the terrific storm that followed swelled the streams beyond all bounds, and the torrent of waters swept over the trail where was the coach, its dead horses and murdered passengers.

If ever any bodies or fragments of the coach were found, it was not known, and thus went the rumor along the Overland trails of the haunted coach, spread to frighten off the outlaws, and proving so successful that it even frightened the drivers and others of the company's people.

The position taken by Quantrel was at a ridge just coming up out of the canyon, which was really a narrow valley, a river running through it.

The valley was heavily timbered, and by moonlight it was a weird place.

Some passenger, hearing the story, had sent at his own expense a marble cross to mark the spot, and Sunset Sam had put it up, while he never passed it without a shudder at the remembrance of the deed.

But for the confession of a captured outlaw, before he was hanged, the mystery of the stage-coach disappearance might never have been solved.

The ridge was as near to the scene of the tragedy as Captain Quantrel could get his men to lie in wait.

Beyond the ridge the trail sloped for a mile or more, and it was good driving.

The outlaws were placed upon either side of the trail, among the rocks, four to close in ahead, four to close in behind, as the chief gave the order to halt.

With his four men he was then to step out and secure his booty, holding what passengers there were along under cover of his guns.

There was an unwritten law among the road-agents, from Omaha to California, never to kill a driver if it could be avoided, or to rob one of money or valuables believed to be really his own.

But he was invariably searched for booty he might be seeking to hide under this rule, and which belonged to others.

Now and then when a daring driver sought to dash through, he would be "winged" as a warning, and in some cases killed, but this was the exception, not the rule, and the Overland drivers were thus spared from a sentiment felt by the road-agents.

No man on the Overland had had more "close calls" than Sunset Sam, and there was no better driver or more daring one.

He always "talked back" at the outlaws, and it was well-known that no two or three road-agents could halt and rob his coach.

This caused the Red Buzzards to always show force when they held up Sunset Sam's coach.

They liked him really, and did not wish to harm him if it could be prevented.

He had given them many a wild chase, had surprised them on several occasions and outwitted them time and again.

He had carried through what he called "a hearse full o' gals" once, which were scouts

disguised as women, and they bagged half the outlaws, too.

He had been shot at time and again, and he always marked the bullet-marks in his coach by tacking over them a silver dime in which was cut a number, and he had just thirty-three of those indications of the outlaws' feelings toward him when he did not draw rein quick enough when held up on the trail.

Captain Quantrel saw that his men were a trifle uneasy, but he laughed at their dread of the place, though in his heart he was as nervous as they were.

At last the moon peered over the mountain and sent its flood of silver light pouring down into the valley.

"It will be an hour yet before the coach comes along," Captain Quantrel said, as the men stood in a group about him, not having yet taken their positions, for Sunset Sam drove as regularly on time as a railroad train.

"It's just about the time, cap'n, that we struck ther coach ther night down yonder," ventured one of the men, and he glanced anxiously toward the bend in the trail around which the coach had to come when appearing in sight.

"Silence, sir! don't be a fool," said Captain Quantrel, as he saw the men moving uneasily, and glancing down the trail.

Then the chief took out a cigar and lighted it, trying to appear unconcerned.

Back in the timber were their horses, not twenty paces away, all of them muzzled to prevent their neighing at the approach of the coach.

The red-beaked masks of the outlaws hung about their necks, ready to be put on at the command, and the chief was about to give the order to mask and take position, when a cry burst from the lips of one of the men and all saw come swiftly around the bend none other than the Phantom Coach.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A STARTLING APPARITION.

SUCH was the nature of the trail, hard and rocky, that the coming of the coach could have been heard by the Red Buzzards on the ridge for half a mile away.

Even had the horses been coming at a slow walk up the trail the grinding of rocks beneath the heavy wheels and the iron-shod hoof-falls would have made sound enough to be heard some little distance.

Imagine then the amazement, the fright, the horror of the group of road-agents, to behold coming suddenly around the bend in the trail a snowy-white coach and horses, and not a sound of their approach reaching their ears.

And yet the coach was not over two hundred paces away.

It was coming too at no slow pace.

Upon the box sat the driver all robed in white, something very like a shroud it seemed, for the ends waved in the wind.

The horses too seemed shrouded, for there was a misty fluttering about them, and not a dark object was seen about the team, harness or coach.

There sat the driver, bolt upright on the box, the reins in his hands, and the moonlight streaming full into his face revealed it ghastly white.

Like men struck into statues the group of outlaws stood, seemingly unable to move foot or arm, and even the brave chief gazed in silent horror.

Not a sound came from wheels or falling hoofs, no creaking of springs was heard as the Phantom Coach came on.

But suddenly the silence of the night was broken by the wildest shrieks.

"Help! Help!" rung out loudly.

Then came:

"Murder! murder!" and following were shrieks, cries and groans infernal, and they seemed to fill the air.

With one chorus yell of horror and terror the outlaws made a bound for their horses, Quantrel in the lead, and in a moment more they were mounted and dashing over the ridge, every one of the cut-throat band spurring for dear life, and holding themselves in the saddle from fear and weakness.

As the last horseman went over the ridge, the Phantom Coach was hardly its length behind him, and swinging along at a swift pace, silent, too, save for a dull, muffled sound, though now and then a wild shriek would ring out that would echo with a cry of terror from the nearest flying outlaw.

Down the grade went the terrified outlaws, the chief in his place as leader, and they were strung out in a long line, while behind them came the startling apparition of a Phantom Coach running away.

The brook at the bottom of the hill was reached by the outlaws, who were heard thundering through the water, and beyond the trail divided and they went rushing off into the timber down the valley.

But the driver of the apparition drew his horses to a slow pace as he neared the brook, and they went through it at a walk.

Then up the trail on the other side the race was quickened, for the moonlight showed that the outlaws had branched off at the brook

along a path a wheeled vehicle could not follow.

As the coach neared the top of a hill the driver came to a halt, the door opened and a form clad in white swung itself up to the box and took the vacant seat.

Then from the lips of the driver broke a long, loud whoop, ending in a wild burst of laughter, which made the rocks and timber ring with many an echo.

"Oh, pard! oh, pard! I are dyin' a-laffin'."

"I was a-bu'stin' all ther time, but jist did hold back."

"Lordy! Lordy! I are a-weepin' tears o' fun when I remembers how them fellers got up an' dusted."

"Why, even the horses was skeert, an' durned ef I believes they has stopped yet."

"No, they'll keep a-goin' ontill Judgment Day."

And another burst of laughter followed the words.

"Put it there, Pard Butterfly, for you is the cleverest cuss I ever seen in the e hur parts."

The Indian youth had also enjoyed the fright of the outlaws, but not to the extent that the driver had.

After awhile Sunset Sam became more calm and said:

"We hed better halt, Pard Butterfly, and take ther shrouds off ther critters and off the old buss, for we may need 'em ag'in."

"All right, Sunset Sam; I think we had, and lose no time about it, either, though I don't think we'll see any more road-agents this night."

"We won't fer a long time, I'm a-thinkin', pard."

"But you be a Jim-dandy, and no mistake."

And the two set to work removing the white covers from the coach and horses, the pads from the wheels, and their own snowy raiment which had given them such a ghostly appearance.

"Waal, I never seen horses and wheels wear petticoats afore; but it's live and I'arn, pard."

"But don't we make fu'st-class ghosts, pard?"

"Yes; couldn't tell us from the real article, eh, Sam?"

Then Red Buzzards tuk us for real graveyard prowlers, all wool and a yard wide, warranted ter wash and never change color," returned Sunset Sam.

Having watered the horses, they drove slowly on their way, for, to get ahead of time and surprise the outlaws, Sunset Sam had driven on rapidly until he reached Death Canyon.

The night was beautiful, the treasure-box had been saved, and they went along in a good humor; at least, Sam said:

"I feels thet good to-night, I c'u'd fergive my mother-in-law, and she were the fu'st one who sent me out inter ther wide world ter make my fortin'."

"I were a-drivin' coach them days in ther Tennessee mountains, and used ter stay a week at one end o' the line, boardin' with a old lady who hed a prime pretty darter."

"I concloded it were cheaper marryin' then payin' board, an' bein' young and foolish I got ther gal ter become Mrs. Samuels, don't yer see?"

"Yes, I see."

"Waal, we went on a bridal tower to ther other end o' ther run, she ridin' on ther box with me, and when we come back ther old lady lit inter me like a catamount."

"I tell yer, Pard Butterfly, she jist mopped up ther stage-yard with me, and, not content with thet, she told me ter wait until she got a gun and come back and kilt me."

"I didn't wait, but lit out from thet town, and I paid a editor five dollars ter put in his paper how I hed been kilt in a accident, and sent it to ther old lady, so they thinks I hev climbed ther Golden; but I hasn't all ther same."

"So I see," said Red Butterfly, with a laugh at Sunset Sam's matrimonial experience and manner of getting a divorce.

The night passed away without further adventure, with a halt at sunrise at a mining-camp for fresh horses and breakfast, for the relays were few and far between on Sunset Sam's run.

In the afternoon Miner's Roost was reached, and the arrival of the coach created a decided impression, for Sam drove up with a rush to the door of the Overland Lodge.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE INDIAN'S RESOLVE.

It had been agreed by Sunset Sam and Red Butterfly that the secret of the Phantom Stage should be kept between them.

"It will help you at other times, I am sure," the Indian youth had said, and the driver agreed with him.

"Leave me to do ther lyin', pard, and I'll tell 'em a story about thet same Phantom Coach thet will travel along the hull line in less than no time."

"My idee be thet Cap'n Quantrel hev got spies at ther camps, and it are well enough for 'em ter know thet we seen thet coach as well as did ther outlaws, don't yer grapple?"

"Yes, I think it is."

"Now as ter yer self, does yer intend ter dwell

in these parts, if I might make so bold as ter ask, and I means it friendly and not cur'ous?"

"Yes, I shall remain on the border."

"I see, and what will yer do?"

"I have not fully determined."

"Pony Express ridin' is a good biz, and pays handsome, and you'd make a tiptop rider I'm thinkin', but then it got ter be so dangerous thet they had ter give it up."

"How so?"

"Waal, one man would be ambushed, yer see, and they got so thet they'd pick off a pony rider a week and so the boys drew out, brave as they was."

"Where was the run?"

"From Miner's Roost to Jumping Off City where I starts from, and back to Hard Times, whar ther army carriers meets ther riders and takes it on; but they is gettin' scared off too, I kin tell yer, as some of 'em has been picked off pretty reg'lar of late."

Red Butterfly listened most attentively to what Sunset Sam said, and then remarked:

"A rider from Hard Times to Jumping Off City and back again, through the various mining-camps and on the trails haunted by the Red Buzzards would have a very good chance to know all that is going on, wouldn't he?"

"Waal, now, he would, pard; he'd get eddicated mighty sudden I'm a-thinkin'."

"Sunset Sam?"

"Yes, Injun pard."

"I shall seek the situation of Pony Express Rider."

Sunset Sam gave a loud whistle, and looked askance at the young Indian.

It was some time before he spoke, and then he said:

"See here, Injun pard, does yer want ter kill yerself?"

"No, Sim, why?"

"Waal, don't be no pony rider, or yer'll turn yer toes up mighty sudden."

"Yes, I've a fancy for the life, and there is but one run a week up and back, as I understand it, and all the rest of my time is my own, so I'll ask for the situation, Sam."

"Waal, you knows best; but yer has more pluck than a man needs ter go inter that biz; but here we is at Miner's Roost, and ef you wishes ter hearken under some sweet-scented lyin' jist listen under me, for I intends ter tell ther boys su'thin' I has seen."

And as he entered the mining-camps Sunset Sam got out his stage-horn to give a blast, when Red Butterfly said:

"Let me give you a bugle note, Sam."

The driver handed it over with a smile and then remarked:

"It's a hard one ter fill, young pard, so don't blow yer brains out."

"Never fear, for my head is hollow, Sam," and placing the horn to his lips he began to wind out the Tyrolese mountaineer's call in a manner that opened Sunset Sam's eyes.

He could blow calls well himself, but this Indian youth amazed him and he said:

"Thet are ther best music ever echoed through these mountings, Pard Injun."

"Give the boys another wakin' up, and ef it were only daylight they'd think Gabriel were a-blowin' his horn fer judgment."

The horn, blown as the denizens of Miner's Roost had never before heard it, brought the men to their cabin doors, awoke those who were enjoying a Sabbath afternoon nap and aroused the crowd about the Overland Lodge to a high pitch of enthusiasm.

"Sam hev got a army bugler fer passenger this trip," said one.

"If it be Sam then he hev taken music lessons fer sure since we heerd him last," another remarked.

"Pards, it hain't Sunset Sam," cried a third. As the coach dashed into sight all saw that the one who was blowing the horn was not Sunset Sam but some one on the box with him.

The coach rattled up at a slapping pace, the driver showing off his style of handling the ribbons, and the horses were stopped with great suddenness as they came in front of the Overland Lodge, while the horn ceased its music.

A wild cheer went up, intended both for Sunset Sam's skill with the reins, and the horn-blower, and every eye was turned upon the latter.

"Pilgrims and fellow-citizens, cut-throats, gents and all of you, it be my proud pleasure to interdooce to yer my young friend, Red Butterfly, a youth who is Injun born, pale-face raised, and square as any man as ever were buckskin."

A wild yell was the answer to the introduction, at which Red Butterfly, thus presented to the community of Miner's Roost in Sunset Sam's rather questionable oratory, took off his sombrero and bowed to the crowd.

Then he leaped nimbly from the box, while Sunset Sam, after placing an armed guard over the coach, led the way to the bar, bidding the young Indian follow with the crowd.

The crowd accepted the invitation with unanimous promptness and alacrity, while Red Butterfly raised his hat politely to Parson Paul, who just then approached and offered his hand, for the parson greeted all strangers in a friendly way.

While the parson and the young Indian were talking together, Sunset Sam was discoursing in the bar upon the adventure on the road.

"Gents, name yer intoxicants, fer it are my treat, seein' as I has seen thet on ther run up I never 'spected ter see afore, nor hain't goin' miles out o' my trail ter gaze on ag'in."

"Now thar hain't no superstish in my composish, as yer all knows, and ther feller as hed said ter me thet he hed see dead folks a-levantin' 'round arter they hed been put in ther little earth bed and tucked in snug, I'd hev told him he were a howlin' liar from the back counties."

"But I hev changed my mind worse nor any woman ever did, as I hes seen a ghost."

"A ghost?" came in a chorus from the crowd.

"No, not a ghost, but a hull stage load of 'em?"

"Sam! Sam!"

"Do any gent say I are a liar?" and Sam glared at the crowd.

Whatever "any gent" might have had as his private opinion on the subject, he very wisely kept it to himself, and Sunset Sam was appeased by the crowd urging him to tell his story.

"Pards, I hes seen thet Phantom Stage-coach, horses, passengers and all."

A chorus of exclamations followed this, and then Sam continued:

"It were a ghost of ther old huss, and thar set old Driver Joe on ther box."

"It were a ghostly team, and they moved along makin' no sound, and no more did ther coach."

"Inside were ther passengers, and they was all hosts and a-screechin' like a nest o' catamounts."

"I tells yer it were awful, and it jist glided by me, as I seen it a-comin' on behind and turned well out ter let it go by."

"It went by with a feelin' like a ice-wagon had gone along, and I felt a chill thet it will take a dozen drinks ter git off of me."

"Thet young Injun seen it too, but he wasn't skeert, and rather liked ther show."

"But thet coach went by, and ther horses trotted on fast behind it in spite o' all I c'd do."

"When we reached the top o' ther ridge, comin' out o' Death Canyon I see thet a gang o' Red Buzzards hed been waitin' fer me."

"But, Lord love yer, pards, ef He kin love such a honerary set as you be, them outlaws didn't wait fer me ter come along, but jist got up and dusted."

"Oh, my! how they did light out, and I guesses they is a-goin' yet, for I never see 'em ag'in, an' thet Phantom Coach it jist skipped along ahead out o' sight."

"Pards, thet are my story."

The story had made an impression, and drinks went around over it until Sunset Sam turned to go, when some one asked:

"But who is thet dandy Injun, Sam?"

"Waal, he are ther gamest youth I ever see, and I owes more to him than I kin ever repay."

"As fer who he is, he's a-goin' ter ride Pony Express through here, so he is."

"And he'll be killed his first ride," gruffly said an old miner, and in this opinion all concurred.

Going out, Sunset Sam found his fresh horses ready for him, and calling to Red Butterfly they mounted the box, and away went the coach on its run to Hard Times.

"Who is ther Injun boy, parson?" asked a miner who had seen the two talking together.

"A youth whom Brother Sunset Sam is surely taking to his death," was the parson's ill-omened response.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TWO SHOTS.

"WELL, boy Injun, I filled 'em full," said Sunset Sam, with a twinkle of the eye, as he drove away from Miner's Roost.

"You told them about the Phantom Coach?"

"I did; I jist loaded 'em clean up to the muzzle."

"Did any of them go off?" asked the Indian youth, who remembered having seen several men come out of the saloon where Sunset Sam was telling his story, one of whom had raised his hands above his head with the remark:

"Satan loveth a cheerful liar!"

Sam understood the true inwardness of the remark, and, with a sly look at Butterfly, said:

"You'll do, pard."

"Yas, two of 'em went off, as ef they could stand no more; but no one that remained doubted me, fer no matter what I tells, it has ter be set down as a chapter o' Gospil, for I backs up my stories with my gun, same as Samson did of old with the jawbone o' a jackass."

"I tell yer, I fed 'em with food as will make 'em think, and it will reach the Red Birds as how we seen thet same Phantom Coach, and thet will clinch the argument."

"Did you load ther parson, fer I seen yer giving him a leetle chin-music?"

"I told him we had seen the Phantom Coach."

"And what did he say?"

"Well, he jist smiled, Sam."

"Thet means he thought you was lyin' to him."

"About that."

"He hain't nobody's fool, ef he does be a Gospil sharp."

"No, Sam; he is a very sensible man, and he gave me some good advice, for I told him I was going to ride the Pony Express."

"Take it, ef yer hed ter pay fer it, fer he's clean grit, has got horse sense, and would fight Satan with spurs on, boy pard."

"I tell yer, I freeze to thet parson, and you would, too, hed yer seen him go arter my runaway coach, while he held a prayer-meetin' one night in ther saloon when he saved the life o' Buffalo Bill, and when he called ther mourners up to the bench, they came."

"Then he were so kind at ther funeral next day, they tells me."

"You freeze to ther parson, Injun pard, for he hain't altogether a Sunday man, for he's sound on every day in the week."

"Yas, I was particularly pleased with him, and he has a strong face."

"Waal, he hev, and a strong hand too; but what is yer lookin' at?"

The youth had suddenly dropped down from the seat, while he said:

"Drive on, Sam."

The coach was just on the ridge of a hill, going over, the trail running down into a vale, and then rising again over another hill a mile distant.

Sunset Sam drove on while the Indian said:

"I saw two men in the trail, and they dodged back over the ridge."

"Waal, thet looks bad, pard."

"When you bend yonder to the right I'll slip inside the coach."

"Yer hain't afeerd o' bullets?"

"Yas, I am always afraid of bullets; but those cannot be the Red Buzzards?"

"No, the ones you seen must be the fellers as goes fer ther Pony Riders and couriers, and they don't belong to Quantrel's band."

"Are there many of them?"

"I never heard thet ther is more than three of 'em, and one of them turned up his toes when ther last army courier were kilt."

"Do you think they intend to hold up the coach?"

"Shouldn't wonder; but they don't know about ther box in hidin'."

"Well, I'll slip inside now," and the youth nimbly swung himself into the coach.

Sunset Sam looked disappointed.

What did it mean, he wondered?

When brought under fire the Indian youth seemed to wilt.

But he drove on his way, determined of course to hold up if ordered to do so, and trusting that the outlaws, whoever they were, did not know of the hiding-place of the treasure-box.

The trail wound on up the hill, after crossing the run, and at last the leaders were upon the ridge, when suddenly two men stepped out in the trail, their rifles leveled, while a third, with revolver in hand, also appeared and called out:

"Sunset Sam, hands up!"

Who they were there was no shadow of doubt, for clad in black and with the Red Buzzards' headmask covering their faces, proved that they belonged to Quantrel's band.

Sunset Sam obeyed the stern command with an alacrity that showed he knew his danger, and yet he said:

"Yas, I halts when you shouts, you infernal red-faced coyotes, but yer won't find no meat ter pick off o' this carcass this day, yer buzzard-faced reptiles."

"Sunset Sam, you should tell the truth sometimes, for I can show you where there is a nest of greenbacks, and it will be a Buzzards' nest in jist two minutes."

"Have you an empty hearse?"

"There's a lad asleep inside."

And Sunset Sam's heart sunk within him, for he knew that the outlaws were aware of the hidden box.

"Keep him covered, men, while I get the box."

"If he shows a sign of trickery, kill him."

"Come down from that box, Sunset Sam!"

Sam groaned, but turned the reins around the brake and was about to obey when quickly rung out two shots, right over the top of the coach, first one side then the other.

The two men with rifles dropped dead in their tracks, and with a cry of rage and alarm the leader raised his revolver toward Sunset Sam when a third shot came and the weapon dropped from his hand.

With an oath the man bounded behind a huge rock and was heard dashing down the hill on horseback.

It had only taken a few seconds, but Sunset Sam realized that the help had come from the Indian youth, who had been standing on the rear box of the coach watching his chance.

He soon appeared around the coach cool as an icicle and said:

"I'll get the hussies belonging to these two men, Sam, to take with us, while you throw the bodies aboard the coach."

"Young pard, you has big wisdom beyond your years, for the proof o' a dead Injun is his

scalp, and we need tell no lies about killin' outlaws with them ter show," and Sam pointed to the two bodies.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON THE BACK TRAIL.

As Red Butterfly disappeared behind the rocks, his revolver in hand, Sunset Sam stood watching him.

"So I thought he hed wilted, did I?"

"Waal, I is a idiot born and bred."

"Now he played it on me and kept up ther time on them Red Varmints."

"Lordy! but don't he shoot to git thar!"

"Now thet feller are struck squar' in ther front o' ther red mark; yas, and t'other one, too."

"Thet lad knows thet ther only way ter keep a man from shootin' back arter he be wounded is ter hit him in ther head, for that allers settles it."

"But how were it he let ther chief go? fer thet were Kit Quantrel sure as shootin'."

Just then the young Indian came back out of the thicket, leading two horses.

The animals seemed to have been hard ridden and were tagged out; but they were handsomely accoutered, and Red Butterfly took off their saddles and bridles and threw them into the coach, after which he hitched the horses behind by their stake-ropes.

Sunset Sam, meanwhile, had hoisted the two bodies on top of the coach, after making a careful examination for revolvers and other weapons.

"Pard, I am ready."

"So am I, Sam," and the Indian mounted to the side of the driver.

Sunset Sam seemed deeply impressed by what had happened.

He had spoken but little, but now that they were moving along again at a brisk pace, he said, while he extended his hand:

"I say, Friend Butterfly, I owes you an ask-pardon, for I wasn't onto yer racket."

"And I asks it, too, and hopes you'll fergive me fer thinkin' you'd wilt in ther least leetle bit."

"It's all right, Sam; I felt that there would not be many of them, and if taken by surprise themselves, we would win."

"I knew you felt sure the hiding-place of the box was not known, and if I said fight it out, you would think best not to do so, and in most cases you would be right."

"So, as we had no luggage, I took position in the rear boot and watched my chance."

"You is a dead shot, pard."

"I had to be, for they had you covered, and their pistols were cocked."

"You is right; but you fired quick, so quick I couldn't understand it."

"You see I fired with each hand, so only had to move my eye from one arm to the other, as the weapons were in position."

"I see, and I don't see, for I never knowed but one man could fire from both hands at the same time with dead-shot aim."

"Who was that?"

"Doc Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout at Fort Venture, and whom ther red-skins calls White Beaver."

"Now he are lightnin' and you isn't any behind him."

"Thank you."

"Oh, I hain't ther one ter be thanked, as you has done it all."

"I mean thank you for the compliment to compare me with the Surgeon Scout of whom I have heard."

"It hain't no compliment fer it's the naked truth, and compliments hain't ther truth but taffy."

"You seem to understand it all, Sam," said the Indian with a smile.

"Waal, I hain't no fool ef I do live west o' civilization."

"But, pard?"

"Ay, ay, Sam?"

"How were it you let Kit Quantrel off?"

"Ah! was that man Kit Quantrel?" excitedly said the youth, his calm mien suddenly changing to the surprise of the driver.

"He were fer a fact."

The youth became calm again, in an instant and said:

"I did not know it was Kit Quantrel the chief; but I could not have killed him had I known it, as I could only see his upraised hand as I fired, not his form."

"Then too had I known it was Quantrel I would not have killed him."

"You wouldn't?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I wish to take him alive; but how did he come here if he was at Death's Canyon last night?"

"He cut around after running from the Phantom Coach to head me off here above Miner's Roost."

"Yer see he come through Buffalo Pass, and that's what made his horses so used up."

"I s'pose them three thet got thar were all thet c'd stand ther hard push, pard."

"Yas, I suppose so; but, Sam?"

"Yas, pard."

"Just stop a minute, for I am going back on the trail."

Sam drew to a halt, but asked:

"Now what in thunder be you arter, Pard Butterfly?"

"I am going to ride one of the outlaws' horses back and pick up the trail of Kit Quantrel."

"See here, Injun, don't you be no fool," said Sunset Sam, so earnestly that the youth laughed.

But he replied, in the same strain in which the driver had spoken:

"See here, Sunset Sam; I don't intend to be a fool; but the time to follow a trail is when it is warm, is it not?"

"It be."

"Well, Kit Quantrel will not suppose he is followed, and I believe I can follow him."

"He knows where to meet his men, and if I can follow them to their retreat, I can go to Hard Times, the fort, or to Miner's Roost for a force of men and lead them to the attack, don't you see?"

"I see, if you don't git run inter ther earth by ther outlaws."

"If we play games with Death, Sam, we must take equal chances, you know."

"Waal, you is a queer one, and I suppose you will go; but this is a fearful prime country to git lost in."

"I cannot be lost, Sam, for I come of a race that instinctively know our way."

"Waal, that is so; but, as I hes some days at Hard Times, I'll jist git a gang ready to go, if you should call, and send word up to the fort of what hev tuk place on this run west, while, of course, I'll swar to the commandant thet we seen the Phantom Coach."

"Well, wesaw it, Sam; at least, all the Phantom Coach there was."

"But now I am off, so look after my traps, please, and leave them at Hard Times."

Five minutes after, mounted upon the best of the two outlaws' horses in lead, the Indian youth was riding back on the trail.

CHAPTER XL.

SUNSET SAM REPORTS.

SUNSET SAM drove on in a thoughtful mood. He also felt a deep regret that his young pard had left him.

"Now, who is thet Injun?" he muttered after awhile.

He may be sixteen, and he may be of age and old enough to vote, if they allowed Injuns to vote, which same they does not, though they be raal Americans from Wayback, when the Irish and Dutchers and other immigrants votes 'arly an' often, ther very fust time votin' day comes around arter they gits here.

"But who be thet young Injun?"

"I give it up."

"And what hev he come here fer?"

"Ask me su'thin' easy."

"He hain't no Injun o' ther plains, fer he be eddicated same as a school-teacher, and he larnt it all East."

"Then he do know Injun ways, and trailin', and kin shoot ther smile off a man's face and not hurt him if he wants ter."

"I know he do keep his mouth tight shut about himself, while he talks about all else."

"As ter bein' quick, he are greased lightnin' on a racket, and my idee is he must hev been showed off in a cirkis, for he hain't got a bone in his body, and durned ef he hain't got a grip strong as I has, and I hain't no slouch."

"He knows how to drive, too, and when he throws his weight at this end o' these lines ther horses can't go on ef they wanted ter."

"He are as myster'us ter me as a woman, and thet are sayin' heaps."

Thus soliloquizing, Sunset Sam drove on, going at a brisk pace as he was anxious to run into Hard Times before dark, though his time was over an hour later.

But he had news to tell, and no passengers, so he pushed rapidly on and when he blew his stage horn Hard Times was in full view.

It was Sunday evening, but no "halo of calm" rested upon the mining-camp of Hard Times.

There was no ringing of church bells to call the people to worship; but instead there was a shooting match in front of the Rest Easy Hotel, and the gambling and drinking saloons were in full blast, with crowded houses, for, as the miners would not work on Sunday, the most of them passed the time in what they deemed sport, and rough play it was, too.

The coming of the coach broke up the target-practice, and all gathered to welcome Sunset Sam.

Among the crowd was a man in better dress than those about him, or rather not in miner's garb, and he was talking to a tall, splendid-looking fellow in a buckskin suit, top-boots and sombrero.

The first was the paymaster of the Overland, and he was anxious-faced regarding the treasure-box which he knew Sunset Sam was to bring through on that trip.

The one he was talking to was Buffalo Bill, who had ridden into Hard Times half an hour before.

The paymaster knew the scout well, and had confided to him his anxiety regarding the treasure-box.

"I have to pay off nearly fifty men, Scout Cody, and it will be a hard set-back on the company if we lose this money, and perhaps cause them to abandon this branch," he was saying when the notes of Sunset Sam's horn were heard and answered with a yell from the crowd.

The next moment the coach dashed into view, and the paymaster said:

"He is early, over an hour ahead of time; but his horn has no doleful wail in it."

"No, it has a ring of triumph, I take it," answered Buffalo Bill, and the two moved up to meet Sam as he drew rein with a "Hoop-lal!" before the Hard Times Hotel.

"Well, Sunset, old fellow, how goes it?" called out the agent.

The crowd suspected, from the presence of the paymaster of the Overland Company at Hard Times, that Sam was to bring a lot of money through, and in dead silence all awaited his reply.

"All safe and serene, cap'n," was the response.

"Then you saw no road-agents?"

"Well, I seen plenty of 'em, more than I ever want ter see ag'in, and I seen thet Phantom Coach they talks of, too."

Some laughed, others looked incredulous, while many never thought of doubting the driver.

"I seen it, I tells yer."

"Does any man call me a liar?"

Sunset Sam's hand now held a revolver, and the smiles faded away.

No man called him a liar, or even looked it.

"I seen, I says."

And he went on and told his story, beginning with the Indian youth who joined him at Jumping Off City.

"As seen' is believin', pards, I'll show yer ther game birds thet young Injun bagged, and they is Red Buzzards, an uncommon hard fowl ter kill."

And Sam drew the cover off the coach, revealing the bodies, while, opening the door, he showed the saddle and bridle of the horse being led behind.

"Now, cap'n, I am ready to make my report, and, Buffalo Bill, I'd a leetle rather you'd hear it, too, as soon as I has got ther dust out o' my throat with a leetle corn-juice."

And Sam led the way into the hotel, followed by the paymaster and Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE INDIAN HORSEMAN.

"WELL, Sam, did you start with the treasure?" asked the paymaster, when he was in his room at the Hard Times Hotel with the driver and Buffalo Bill.

"I did."

"And brought it through?"

"It's aboard ther coach in a snug hidin'-place, and I'll get it as soon as it's good dark."

Then Sam told the plan to hide it, and which the outlaws had discovered, and how the young Indian had saved the money from the last band of road agents.

As to the first meeting with the Red Buzzards, he stuck to it that the Phantom Coach had scared them off and he had driven on unmolested, but the chief and two of his men had ridden hard and headed him off above Miner's Roost.

Buffalo Bill smiled and said:

"See here, Sam, that Jumping Off City whisky must be awful stuff to have you see a phantom coach, team and passengers."

"It wasn't ther whisky, Bill, for I drink light; but I seen it, and that is what put the road-agents to flyin' off."

"I tell you it made me feel chilly."

Neither Buffalo Bill nor the paymaster were convinced as to the Phantom Coach, and as Sam went out to get the treasure the former said:

"It's some job Sam has put up and won't give away."

"That is your opinion, Cody?"

"Yes, sir; and if it works every time he'll be in luck."

"I confess I did not understand it, for Sam is not known as a liar."

"Well, nobody ever suggests to him that he is; but he is lying about this Phantom Coach, and sticks to it well; but let him keep it up if it will do any good."

"Now what surprises me more than the coach is this Indian youth he talks about."

"You believe that?"

"Oh, yes, but as I never yet saw an educated Indian, as we call education, and one who played exactly the rôle that this one does, it is beyond me to understand."

"He is a dead shot, that is certain, and he has pluck to go on the Pony Express line after what Sam told him."

"Yes, and he has gone back now on the trail of the outlaws."

"That may be bravado, and it may not."

"He may come riding in here soon, saying he could find nothing of the outlaws, and he may strike their trail and follow them to their retreat."

"If he does I'll give him a berth as scout with

big pay, and more, the commandant will give him the place of a Pony Rider from Fort Venture to Jumping Off City."

"Yes, and the company will pay him extra to push its important business through; but here comes Sam."

The driver entered, and in a blanket he had the box, which the paymaster, having a key, opened and found the contents all safe.

"You owe that to ther boy Injun, cap'n," said Sam, and turning to Cody he continued:

"See here, Buffalo Bill, thet Injun wants to ride atween the fort and here, as it's a bad run."

"He can get the chance, Sam, as I am here now looking for a man, for the couriers have been picked off so rapidly they won't volunteer any more now, except in rare cases."

"Waal, thet red-skin youth will go through if anybody will be able ter do so."

"Well, I shall wait to-morrow here to see if he turns up, and if not return to the fort, for he may have gone there, and I have a scout coming here from Miner's Roost, so if your red-skin pard goes there, as he might, we will know before night."

"Waal, I'll feel around among the boys for a lot to go with me if the boy comes in with news that he has tracked the Red Birds, and you must be capt'in, Buffalo Bill, if we goes."

"All right, Sunset Sam, I am with you," was the reply, and the three men separated for the night.

The next afternoon, Jack Crawford came in from Miner's Roost, and reported all quiet there.

He had seen nothing of the red-skin youth, and after waiting until several hours after nightfall and the Red Butterfly not appearing, the two scouts left Hard Times for the fort.

It was after sunrise when they came in sight of the fort, and Buffalo Bill said quickly:

"See there, Jack."

He pointed to a horseman riding toward the fort at a canter, and a mile away from them.

His glass was at once leveled upon the horseman, when he said quickly:

"Jack Crawford, that is Sunset Sam's Indian boy."

"No?"

"It is, sure, and how in the name of thunder did he find the fort?"

"I give it up; but he's going there at a lively pace."

"Yes, and we must push on, for that Indian has news."

"What if he should have found the retreat of the Buzzards, Jack?"

"Then he knocks us out most certainly."

"Yes, in the first round; but we'll soon know who he is, and what he has done," and the two scouts rode rapidly on toward the fort.

But the Indian horseman had gone in ahead of them.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE RED SKIN GUIDE.

UPON entering the fort, Buffalo Bill and Jack Crawford went at once to report to Captain Benteen.

They found that officer conversing with the one they had seen riding toward the fort.

It was Red Butterfly, and he looked a little haggard from a long and hard ride without rest.

"Ah! Cody, I am glad you are here, for this Indian youth brings valuable news."

"Do you know him?" said Captain Benteen.

"I never saw him before, Captain Benteen, but I know a great deal of Red Butterfly from his friend, Sunset Sam, and he's one I am glad to know," and Buffalo Bill held out his hand, which was grasped by the Indian youth with evident pleasure at meeting the scout, while he said pleasantly:

"I have heard so much of Buffalo Bill that I am most happy to meet him face to face; but may I continue my story, sir, as time may be most important?"

"Certainly, only let these scouts hear what you have to say—what was it you called him, Cody?"

"I am called Red Butterfly, sir."

"Then, Mr. Red Butterfly, let us have your report."

Thus urged the Indian youth, whose striking appearance riveted the eyes of Captain Benteen and the two scouts upon him, said in a pleasant way that seemed natural to him:

"I rode out of Jumping Off City on Sunset Sam's coach, as I had heard a plot to rob him, and we managed to frighten off the outlaws; but three of them, one being Captain Quantrel, headed us off above Miner's Roost, and being on the rear boot I opened fire and we went through safely."

"Anybody hurt?" asked Cody dryly.

"I wounded the chief, sir, and as we had gotten hold of two of their horses, I took one to go on the trail."

"Captain Benteen, pardon me, sir, if I tell this story as I had it from Sunset Sam, for this modest young Indian leaves out that he killed two of the outlaws, shooting both in the center of their foreheads, and shot the chief in the arm as he was raising his revolver to fire upon the

driver, for his arm was all that he could see at the time he fired.

"Sam brought the two bodies and one horse to Hard Times and said this youth had gone back to follow Quantrel's trail, and would report to Miner's Roost, Hard Times, or the fort.

"Now he has reported here."

"Well, Cody, I am glad of your explanation, for it shows us that Red Butterfly does not give himself due credit.

"But you followed the trail of Quantrel, Butterfly?"

"Yes, sir, he did not seem to fear being trailed, so rode on and met his men whom he had outridden with two others, when he ran from the Death Canyon.

"I tracked him to his retreat, but he broke camp at once and traveled through the night to a canyon some fifty miles from here.

"I kept them in sight, for it was too dark to trail, and when I saw them go into camp as though to remain a day or more, I lay in hiding until night, and then cut a horse out of the corral and came to the fort as the nearest place to get aid to attack them.

"The horse I rode was so fagged out I turned him loose, and urged the one that brought me here to good speed."

"May I ask how you found your way to the fort in the night, as you never knew the country?" asked Captain Benteen.

"An Indian goes where he wills, sir, night or day.

"No country is strange to one of my race, sir," was the answer, yet Buffalo Bill thought that it was evasive, and muttered, to himself:

"That Indian knows this country well, I am certain."

"Well, Red Butterfly, to say that you have done well would be mild praise, for you have more than done your duty.

"To what tribe do you belong?"

"I was a Sioux, sir."

"And now?"

"I am an outcast Indian," was the bitter reply.

Seeing that the Indian felt keenly his question, the captain hastily said:

"Well, my brave fellow, am I to understand that you are here to guide a force to the retreat of the Red Buzzards?"

"I am, sir, and then I seek the place of Pony Rider on the trail from here to Jumping Off City."

"It is a very long and, I may say, a fatal trail."

"May I have the place, sir?"

"Yes, if you are willing to take the chances of a hundred to one."

"I'll take them, sir; but we better be on the trail, sir, as it will take a cavalry force into the night to reach the retreat."

"Cody, get half a dozen of your men together, and I will look after the comfort of this youth and order Lieutenant Ames and thirty men to go on this trail, for the outlaws must be wiped out utterly."

"The force is not enough, sir, for the outlaws number over thirty men and fight on their own ground.

"The more scouts you send, too, sir, the better, for they know better what to do than soldiers."

Captain Benteen and the two scouts gazed at the young Indian in amazement, both Buffalo Bill and Jack Crawford feeling complimented at the compliment he had paid the scouts.

The captain laughed and said:

"By the gods of war, my young Indian friend, you are right, and I'll follow your well-put advice for it chimes in with my views, now I know the force of the outlaws."

Two hours after the Indian youth as guide, rode with Buffalo Bill ahead of the cavalry company commanded by Lieutenant Ames, and their destination was to hunt down Quantrel and his band.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TOO LATE.

BUFFALO BILL, as he rode along with the Indian guide, became more and more interested in him.

The youth had nothing to say about himself, and all of the scout's ingenuity could not discover anything about him.

Red Butterfly said that he was of the Sioux race, had been educated East, and had come West to see something of wild Western life.

He was anxious to become a Pony Rider, and believed that he could give satisfaction as such.

Back at Jumping Off City he had a fine pack-horse and two splendid riding animals, with a few belongings.

He had left them there to come on with Sunset Sam, who was to be held up by road-agents.

More than this Buffalo Bill could not discover.

He let the Indian take the trail, and noted that he went unerringly.

"The boy has had training on the plains, that is certain," mused the scout.

Then he questioned him about Sunset Sam's story of the Phantom Coach.

"Did you see it?" he asked.

"Oh, yes."

"You really saw the Phantom Coach?"

"As distinctly as I see you this minute."

"When was it?"

"At night."

"Moonlight?"

"Yes, the moon was shining as bright as day."

"You saw a white coach, horses and driver?"

"I did."

"And heard wild shrieks, moans and cries for help?"

"Distinctly."

"Where did it go?"

"It went on with us until it reached a valley, and there the Phantom disappeared."

"It made no sound?"

"There was a muffled-like sound as it went along."

"And you did not hear the ring of the iron hoofs upon the rock trail?"

"They fell noiselessly."

"This is remarkable."

"So the road-agents thought, too, Mr. Cody."

Buffalo Bill glanced quickly into the face of the Indian youth.

But it was perfectly impassive.

If he was telling a story, the scout thought, he did it most perfectly.

"I knew Sunset Sam was a giant liar, when he set his tongue to dodge the truth, so I did not believe him; but I don't know what to think when you seriously tell me you saw what you did."

"I saw it, Mr. Cody, as I tell you, and yet I do not believe in the slightest degree in superstition."

"Then how do you account for a ghostly coach, horses and passengers?"

"That is one thing that must remain a mystery until the solution is known," said Red Butterfly, thoughtfully.

It will be seen that the Indian youth did not in the slightest instance tell an untruth.

He saw what he said he did, and he offered no explanation as to the real cause, and that was what puzzled Buffalo Bill.

The scout also saw that the youth led at a pace that was just what could be kept up by the cavalry.

He seemed to measure the traveling speed and endurance of the horses, and he picked his way well, halting just where the scout had intended suggesting to Lieutenant Ames to make a halt for rest.

The Indian guide and Buffalo Bill rode some distance in advance, and then came Lieutenant Ames, his bugler and men.

Behind were Buffalo Bill's scouts, with Jack Crawford in command, and they numbered ten men.

Lieutenant Ames was one of the most dashing young cavalry officers on the plains, and as handsome as an Adonis.

He had stood number one in his class at West Point, and won his spurs before he had been a month in service in the field.

Then, too, he had kept his spurs bright by many a gallant act, and was as popular with his brother officers as with the ladies.

Doctor Schufeldt, the assistant-surgeon of the post, had been sent along, and a second lieutenant also, so that Lieutenant Ames, with two officers, forty four men, and Buffalo Bill and his scouts, felt strong enough to make a clean sweep of the outlaws.

The young Indian guide seemed to be the center of attraction, for Buffalo Bill had made known Sunset Sam's story regarding him, and all knew that he had trailed Quantrel to his lair and then came to the fort to get a force to bag him and his outfit.

The mystery about the youth, his slender but perfect form, face of really womanly beauty and courteous, refined manners, not to speak of his education, made him an object of deepest interest to all.

Then, too, he was a superb horseman, and that he could use his revolvers with deadly effect all had heard.

"Did you wound the chief severely, do you think, Red Butterfly?" asked Lieutenant Ames, as they halted for dinner and rest.

"He carried his arm in a sling, sir, I noticed when in camp last night."

"Then you saw him last night?"

"Yes, sir; I got near enough to take in the camp, its situation, numbers and advantages."

"We can attack it from two points, sir, through a canyon where a sentinel is stationed, and by way of the narrow valley at the head of which it is situated."

"The chief's tent is at the canyon, the men across from it, and the cattle are down the valley under two guards."

"And yet you managed to get a horse?"

"Oh, yes, sir; it was not such hard work," answered the young Indian, and Buffalo Bill muttered, to himself:

"That Indian knows the valley well."

"He has been there before, I am certain."

After an hour's rest the march was resumed, and another halt was made at sunset.

Then the command again moved on, and at

last the glare of the camp-fires up the valley came into view.

Buffalo Bill and his scouts went by way of the canyon, and Red Butterfly led the soldiers up the valley until near enough to make a dash.

Then the command was given to charge, and the troopers dashed into the camps and were met by the scouts.

But, though their camp-fires still burned, the Red Buzzards had flown from the nest.

CHAPTER XLIV.

FINDING A CLEW.

THE scouts, under Buffalo Bill, had entered the canyon with the sure belief that they would rush right in upon the outlaws, and with the soldiers coming up the valley catch them in between two fires.

That it would be a complete surprise all believed, and that the end of the outlaw band was at hand no one doubted.

In the charge of the soldiers Red Butterfly had been at the side of the young lieutenant.

He had pointed out the corral over against the hills, and was as cool as if riding out for pleasure.

When the command had been given to charge, he had dropped his bridle-rein upon the horn of his saddle, drawn a revolver in each hand and gone on to meet the foe.

But the foe was not there.

The camp-fires were replenished and burned up brightly, but not a trace of the outlaws could be found.

Buffalo Bill, his scouts and Red Butterfly went off to find their trail if possible.

At last came a halloo from the Indian guide and all went there.

"They went up the mountain over that rock," he said, pointing to a rock thirty feet high.

"How did they get up there, for though buzzards in name they are not by nature and cannot fly," said the lieutenant, greatly disappointed at the result of the expedition.

"This was the corral."

"I see that by the tracks of the horses," said Lieutenant Ames, for the moon had risen and all in the valley was plainly visible now.

"They had a stake-rope running from this wall of rock around those trees, keeping the horses in, and the guards stood there by that rock, and the other by the large tree."

"You saw this last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"But how did they get away by going up that rock?" asked Dr. Schufeldt.

"No other trail can be found except the one they came into the valley by."

"That is so," Buffalo Bill remarked.

"They did not return by that trail."

"No, they did not," Cody said, for scouts and all had gathered around.

"There are plenty of tracks leading from the camp to the corral and back."

"Yes."

"They look as though the horses had been led back and forth."

"That's what the tracks look like," Buffalo Bill said.

"Well, now, up to that ledge is only thirty feet, and horses could be drawn up there one by one with a couple of stout pieces of timber as a derrick, rigged with block and tackle."

"Boy, you are a wonder."

"Quick, Cody, get around to the ledge some way and see if there are trails up there," cried Lieutenant Ames.

Buffalo Bill had already seen the Indian youth's idea, and was starting off when Red Butterfly called out:

"Come this way, Mr. Cody."

He obeyed and they soon came to where a tree grew on the cliff.

"Give me your lariat, please."

Buffalo Bill handed it over, taking it from his saddle-horn, and the Indian threw the noose skillfully over a limb of the tree which had been broken off.

Then as nimbly as a sailor he went up the lariat to the top of the cliff, and Buffalo Bill followed, though more slowly, as he said pleasantly:

"I've got more weight to pull up, Butterfly, than you have."

Along the cliff they made their way until they stood over the corral and Buffalo Bill called out with more excitement than he was often wont to exhibit:

"The Red Butterfly's right, sir, here is the trail."

A shout greeted his words and Lieutenant Ames asked quickly:

"Are there any timbers there?"

"Yes, sir."

And he added after a moment:

"They are freshly cut trees, sir, about six inches in diameter."

"Well, can we get up the same way, Cody?"

"We have no block and tackle, sir, which Quantrel is furnished with, and which explains many of his escapes and lost trails."

"But can we not go around to strike the trail?"

"I can guide you around, sir, to the ridge, by a ten-mile march, if Mr. Cody can follow this trail with some of his men," said Butterfly.

"That boy *does* know this country," muttered Buffalo Bill.

"For I don't know the way round myself."

"All right, Red Butterfly, you come back into the valley, and, Cody, take what men you wish with you."

"I'll take my scouts, sir."

"All right."

"Men, you will have to climb that lariat," said the lieutenant.

Texas Jack, who had been a sailor in his boyhood, went up like a cat; but the others found it no easy work, excepting Jack Crawford, who also made light of it.

Then the scouts, led by Buffalo Bill, set off over the mountain, while the soldiers mounted and rode down the valley.

The rear guard led the scouts' horses, and Lieutenant Ames now rode ahead with Red Butterfly, to whom he remarked after they had gone a few miles:

"See here, Red Butterfly, you certainly have been through this country before, for you know it like a book, and have not been at fault all day."

"It was the hunting-grounds of my people, sir, when I was young, and I learned then all I know of the country and border craft," was the modest reply.

"You learned your lesson well I must say."

"Red-skins are apt pupils, sir, for it is their nature to be."

"We are children of the plains and forests, sir, you know."

"Well, you seem to have learned the language and ways of the pale-faces as well as the craft of the Indian."

"I studied hard to learn, sir, for I did not care to be a drone in the pale-face hive; but here is where we go to the top of the ridge."

The ridge was reached, and getting down upon the ground, Red Butterfly soon said:

"The scouts have not passed, but the outlaws have."

"How do you know?"

"The outlaws were mounted, sir, the scouts were on foot," was the reply of the young Indian.

As he spoke, in the distance coming up the trail the scouts were discovered approaching the spot where the soldiers had halted.

CHAPTER XLV.

ALONE ON THE TRAIL.

BUFFALO BILL and his scouts arrived somewhat tired from their up-hill tramp, for it was a rugged one as well.

The trail had been easily followed by the buckskin heroes, and they arrived to find the soldiers ahead of them.

Buffalo Bill was the more convinced that the Indian youth knew more about the country than he admitted he did, yet he kept this belief to himself.

"Well, Cody, here we are, and what is to be done?" said Lieutenant Ames.

"I suppose we must stick to the trail, sir."

"That is what Red Butterfly said, so we will move on."

"Pardon me, sir, but it would be well to let a couple of scouts go on ahead, as we might run upon an ambush."

"You are right, Red Butterfly, and I will take your advice," said the young commander, frankly.

"I will go ahead, sir, if Mr. Cody will send a man to follow me, so as to bring the alarm back should I run into a trap."

"You will stay with me, Red Butterfly, for you have been constantly on the go, I take it, since you left Sunset Sam's coach, sixty hours ago."

"Human nature has its limits, you know," and turning to Buffalo Bill he told him to send two of his best men ahead.

Night Hawk and Broncho Bill Powell at once stepped forward and volunteered for the work, and as soon as they moved ahead the command started to follow, Red Butterfly, relieved of all anxiety, coolly going to sleep in his saddle.

He awoke with a start as the command halted, and to his surprise it was good daybreak.

"Well, Red Butterfly, you have slept for several hours."

"Yes, Lieutenant Ames, and I am as good as new now; but we are at the river."

"We are, and the trail is lost."

"It entered the river here, sir."

"Yes, and does not come out on the other shore."

"What do Mr. Cody and his men say, sir?"

"They are at a loss to know which way the outlaws have gone, and it was right at this point that Cody and the Buckskin Brothers lost the trail of Quantrel the night he and some of his men entered Miner's Roost and kidnapped a miner by the name of Yankee Dan."

"And it was Buffalo Bill who followed their trail, sir?"

"Yes; and lost it right here."

"They could not go down the river, as there is no landing for ten miles, so the horses could not swim it, and there was no sign of their going ashore at the lower ford."

"Cody and his men are now going up stream to see if there is a landing, though no man or

horse could swim half a mile against this current."

The troopers had camped and were cooking breakfast, as were also all of the scouts excepting those who had gone up the river with Buffalo Bill.

Soon they returned and reported no break in the steep banks for a mile or more, and the impossibility of stemming the stream proved conclusively that they could not have gone that way.

"Did you ever hear of a boat on this river, Mr. Cody?" asked Red Butterfly.

"I never did, nor have any of my men."

The Indian was silent for some minutes while the others talked over the matter.

At last he said:

"Will you give up the trail, Lieutenant Ames?"

"What else is to be done?"

"I will take it alone, sir."

"Where is the trail for you to take, Red Butterfly?" almost impatiently responded the officer.

"There, sir."

And the Indian pointed to the river swiftly flowing by.

"Well, you'll be clever indeed if you can follow a trail on the water," said Lieutenant Ames.

"I'll take to the water, sir, and if I make any discovery, you will find me after you at the fort."

"Will you swim?"

"If I have to, sir; but I'll start on a raft."

"What! with your horse?"

"Oh, no, sir; but if you will let the men rig me up a raft of logs, I'll start on my way."

"Oh, I'll do it, for somehow I believe you know just what you are about, Red Butterfly."

"Thank you, sir."

The lieutenant then ordered several of the soldiers to take axes from the pack-saddles and cut some logs, while lariats were used to fasten them together.

Red Butterfly superintended the work, and when the little raft was completed it would readily support two men and keep them dry.

A long pole was then cut, a roll of blankets put aboard, and some provisions, and all was ready for the start, when Buffalo Bill said:

"Don't you want company, Red Butterfly?"

"No, Mr. Cody, I prefer to go alone," was the frank response.

Then, with a wave of the hand, the Indian youth called to the men to let go the line, hauled it in, and taking his long pole, sat down upon the center log to enjoy his voyage as best he might.

The soldiers and scouts cheered him, and a few minutes after he swept around a bend out of sight, going at a six-mile-an-hour speed.

"Now, Lieutenant, I will take Wild Bill and Texas Jack and go down the river on this side, while the Powell Brothers ride down the other shore, and we'll keep as near the daring young red-skin as we can, for he may need us before he reaches the end of his voyage," said Buffalo Bill.

"Well, Cody, do so, and I will start for the fort by slow marches, so you can send after me if needed; but I believe if the outlaws are to be found that Indian youth will find them."

"So I believe, sir, and all of the scouts are of the same opinion."

"If he lives to get off of this trip, we wish him to join our League," and Buffalo Bill told off the scouts to follow the stream down on either bank, sent Jack Crawford to make the rounds of the places where Surgeon Powell was to leave letters, to see if there was anything from him, and had the remainder of his men go with Lieutenant Ames and his command.

It was not long before the force in search of the outlaws was divided into five parties, Red Butterfly alone floating down the river, two bands of scouts going down the banks, Jack Crawford off on a special mission, and the troopers on their way back to the fort, deeply chagrined at their failure to capture Quantrel and his men, after having them almost in their very grasp, as it seemed to them, when they dashed into their deserted retreat.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE RED SKIN VOYAGER.

THE Red Butterfly went off on his perilous trip down the river with a fearless heart and determination to solve the mystery of the lost trail.

His repeating rifle, one he had taken from one of the outlaws who had held up the stage, lay upon the log by his side and his revolvers were in his belt.

His roll of blankets and haversack of provisions were also on the log, and he had his long pole ready to guide his queer boat from dangers, or to push it ashore, for only here and there it was that he could not reach the river-bottom, the average of depth being from ten to twelve feet.

Around the bend he swept, his pole ready for use, and his rifle too if need be.

His eyes scanned the banks closely, and he was on the watch for any break where a landing could be made.

He had formed the idea that the outlaws had gone down the river, and he wished to know just how it had been done.

It would take a large raft indeed to carry so many horses, packs and men, and yet how else could a force of that size whose trail ended at the river so utterly disappear, except by going down the stream?

So down the river he floated, rounding the bends from time to time, keeping as near the center as he could, and eying the shores like a hawk.

He passed the ford some ten miles below the starting-point, and then swept on down between banks still more precipitous.

Noon came and he poled ashore, tied up to a tree and ate his dinner.

Then he again started on his way.

The banks narrowing as the river wound around a mountain, became wall-like and impassable wholly, while the current more confined surged along at a much greater speed here and there.

His raft worked badly, yet it was strongly tied together and he had no fear of its coming apart, and stood ready with his guide-pole in case of seeing sunken rock ahead.

At last the shadows began to lengthen, the scenery became wilder, grander, and the current more swift and dangerous, while ahead was an island beautifully wooded.

Toward this the young voyager headed his raft, and with considerable effort ran ashore, when he sprung out, the line in his hand, and made fast.

Then he looked about him and walked toward the lower end of the island.

It was nearly dark, and he stopped suddenly at what he beheld.

The island forked at its lower end, and the space between was a secure harbor in which he beheld, made fast to the trees, a boat.

Red Butterfly took up a position of observation and kept a close watch until it got too dark for him to see.

Then he crept nearer, and at last ventured on board.

There was the boat, and not a human being about it; but it told the manner of the outlaws' escape, the mystery of the lost trail, for the furnaces were still warm.

"I'll just camp aboard to-night," he said, and he did so, not daring to light a fire.

The dawn revealed the boat in all its rude construction.

It was a hundred feet long, built of the rudest sawn planks, and in width was some thirty-five feet, while the bows were quite blunt.

It had a shed deck, was more like a flat-boat than anything else, and astern was a huge paddle-wheel and double rudder, while the machinery was such as is seen in sawmills, and had been ingeniously put to use to drive the queer craft.

"This would hold the whole outlaw outfit, horses, pack-mules, men and all, and this is what they escaped in."

"They keep it here and run it up or down the river when they are on a retreat, for half a dozen men sent on ahead could get it to a point on the river where it was needed in a few hours."

"Now to find where the outlaws landed."

There was a skiff with oars in it seemingly tied to the boat, but an examination revealed that the rope passed through a block and went down into the water.

There was another rope made fast astern and also sunk.

Hauling on this, Red Butterfly began to draw the skiff out into the stream, though it still appeared made fast to the boat.

Across he went to the other shore, where the ropes went around the trunk of a tree, and he saw that a man hauling on one line could draw the skiff ashore, and then pull it back again to the boat concealed on the island, hardly over seventy feet distant.

The trails he saw ashore showed that the outlaws had landed there, the boat had then been run in to the island, and the crew coming back in the skiff had drawn it to its place again.

Then Red Butterfly pondered long and earnestly upon his discovery and having made up his mind returned to the island.

Going back to his raft he turned it adrift, and then, with his traps, set himself ashore in the skiff.

Hauling the skiff back to its position, and hiding the rope as before, he started on foot for the fort.

In the mean while the scouts on the river-banks had gone down as far as the nature of the land would allow them to follow near the stream and then were forced to branch out around the mountains, when each party made their way to the fort.

The soldiers under Lieutenant Ames arrived at the fort the morning after seeing Red Butterfly start upon his voyage, and next to come in were the two Powell brothers, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill.

They reported that they had gone down the stream until forced to go too far away, from the rugged country through which it wound, to be of any service to the Indian youth it needed.

That night Buffalo Bill and his two comrades came in and made about the same report.

It was the next day when a horseman was described coming toward the fort, and many hoped it was Red Butterfly, who in some way had gotten a mount.

But as he drew near it was seen to be Jack Crawford, and the first thing he said as Buffalo Bill met him was:

"I've got a letter for you from the Surgeon Scout."

Buffalo Bill could have given a yell of delight, but restrained his joy and hastened to Captain Benteen with the letter.

"Read it quick, Cody, and let us see what Frank Powell has been up to," urged Captain Benteen, and Buffalo Bill read as follows:

"I saw you and your two comrades at Miner's Roost, but could not communicate."

"Your trail of the kidnappers I know was useless, for they reached their retreat with their prisoner, and will hold him, believing he is shamming loss of reason."

"If satisfied they can get nothing from him, he will be put to death."

"I am laying my trap as well as I can, but it is slow work."

"Sunset Sam's coach was held up above Miner's Roost and had treasure on board, but an Indian youth beat off Quantrel and his men."

"The Indian is here for some mysterious purpose."

"If he crosses your path, aid him."

"I am safe and well, and will write again when I can give news."

Such was the letter from the Surgeon Scout, Frank Powell, and it was a great cause of satisfaction to Captain Benteen and Buffalo Bill to find that he was still alive, that no harm had befallen him.

"Powell is plotting and planning well, Cody, I am sure, and he will take his own time and go his own way about it," said Captain Benteen.

Then he asked:

"And now about that splendid young red-skin?"

"I do not know what to say, sir, and if he does not turn up to-morrow I shall fear that he is dead."

"So will I."

But Red Butterfly did not appear upon the next day, and all in the fort felt confident that he was dead.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE RETURN.

DAYS had passed since the return of the outlaw-hunters to Fort Venture, and the scouts were kept busy at work on the Indian frontier, for the red-skins were getting bolder each week.

Red Butterfly had not returned, and he was set down as either drowned or killed by all but a few in the fort, and those few, always to be found in every community, said that he was no more or less than an Indian spy, or perhaps one of the outlaw band.

They ignored facts, and instanced his remarkable familiarity with the country, and how readily he had followed the trails of the outlaws up to a given time, after which he had most cleverly parted company with the soldiers.

But one dark, stormy night the sentinel's challenge rung out sharp and stern:

"Halt! who comes there?"

"Friend; but I have no countersign."

"Call the officer of the day," was the prompt response.

"Corporal of the guard!"

"Post Number One!" sung out the sentinel, who had been considerably startled by being hailed from out in the darkness before he had been seen.

The corporal came, and the officer of the day discovered that it was no less a personage than Red Butterfly.

He was on foot, and in sorry plight, but appeared before Captain Benteen as chipper as a lark.

The captain wrung his hand most warmly, while he said:

"Welcome back, my dear young fellow, for we all deemed you dead here."

"No, sir, not quite, though very tired, for I made my way on foot from the river, and had to lie hidden for three days, as some Indians camped around me."

"But I have news for you, sir."

"Well, out with it, Red Butterfly."

"Those red-skins are waiting for a larger force to arrive and make a dash on the fort."

"Ah!"

"They changed their camp, and that gave me a chance to escape, but I could not get one of their ponies for fear of putting them on their guard."

"How many of them did you see, Butterfly?"

"Just two hundred, sir, for I had nothing else to do but count them."

"I was up a tree, you know."

"Well, it's lucky you did not go to sleep and fall out."

"I tied myself to the tree, sir; but it is a wonder they did not see me."

"Sioux?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would they have harmed you?"

"Yes, sir, they would have tortured me to death."

"And the force they expected?"

"Was to come from Red Top, sir."

"How many?"

"Four hundred, sir, under Chief Sharp Teeth."

"The old scoundrel; but where was the party you saw?"

"Camped on Blue Water, sir."

"And where did they go?"

"Only a couple of miles further down the stream, sir."

"When was this?"

"This morning, sir."

"And you have come here since then?"

"Yes, sir."

"On foot?"

"Yes, Captain Benteen."

"How did you do it?"

"I came at an Indian runner's gait, sir."

"And when did they expect the larger force?"

"They were expecting it every hour."

"In which case they would move at once upon the fort?"

"Yes, sir, and this is a splendid night for their work."

"You are right," and Captain Benteen sprang to his feet, called his orderly, and orders were sent for half a dozen of the fort officers to come at once to headquarters.

Buffalo Bill was also sent for, the sentinels were trebled on their posts, and the whole garrison, in less than half an hour, was under arms and ready for an attack.

Midnight came and passed, and daylight was drawing near, while yet the rain-storm lasted.

But suddenly around the fort ran a sheet of red flame, and over a hundred muskets flashed, while the four cannon boomed forth their hoarse thunder, and revolvers cracked in chorus with repeating-rifles.

The red-skins had surrounded the fort, and made a dash in the intense darkness and rain, and felt sure of carrying the fort.

But the sheet of flame and leaden hail that met them, told that their coming was known, and their wild war-cries of triumph quickly changed to yells of fury and hatred as warriors and ponies went down in the mad rush.

They knew that it was no use to make another effort to carry the fort, and in despair they surged back, carrying whatever wounded and dead they could, when brightly flashed the rockets in the air illumining the scene, and Lieutenant Ames and his troopers, and Buffalo Bill and his scouts dashed out upon the flying red-skins in their mad flight.

And Red Butterfly stood gazing upon the scene with stern face; but not a shot did he fire, not a hand did he raise, for he said to Captain Benteen:

"I cannot kill my own people, sir."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A REWARD REFUSED.

"He does not seem like an Indian."

"Nor like a plainsman."

"Except on a trail."

"Yes, he is perfection as a trailer."

"And a dead shot."

"Yes, the deadliest of shots."

"He can stand more punishment than any one I ever saw."

"Yes, his frame is as tough as a pine-knot."

"He has more pluck than any one I ever saw."

"Yes, to dare attempt to ride Pony Express after twelve men have been killed on this run, and he is Number 'Thirteen.'"

"An unlucky number."

"Yes, but he is indifferent to danger."

"The captain is just gone on the young fellow."

"And so is Buffalo Bill."

"Every scout in the fort is."

"Well, he saved the fort, I am dead sure, for his warning was just in time, as the scouts have been so worried down of late they were resting for a couple of days, and the Indians followed them right in."

"Yes, it would have been a desperate fight for life, if not a massacre."

Such was the conversation heard in the fort the second day after the midnight attack of the Sioux.

The subject was of course the Indian youth, who had been keeping close to the quarters which Captain Benteen had assigned to him, near his own.

He certainly needed rest after the hardships he had known, and he seemed to shun attention and too much notice.

His terrible trip after leaving the command had not seemed to disturb him after he had gained some rest, and the fact that he would not fire upon the Sioux redounded to his credit rather than against him.

Those who doubted him were silenced, and well for them was it that they were, for Red Butterfly had made friends of officers, soldiers and scouts.

After the reaction of the night battle was

over, Red Butterfly reported to Captain Benteen, who received him most cordially.

In fact, this gallant soldier hero looked upon the youth as not akin to an Indian, and really as his especial guest.

"Sit down, Butterfly, and tell me if you feel yourself again."

"Oh, yes, sir, I am just as good as new."

"Well, I have a mind to ask for you a cadetship at the Military Academy for the gallant services you have rendered."

"An Indian, sir, at the West Point Military Academy!" said Red Butterfly with cutting sarcasm.

"Yes, why not, for you could readily pass the examination mentally and physically?"

"I heard you talking in French to Ernest, and your accent is perfect, while Doctor Schufeldt says that you are a fine German scholar, as he heard you in conversation with Corporal Klein when he was dying in the hospital."

"Now why should you not be a West Point boy?"

"I am an Indian, sir, your kindness to me permits you to forget," and the tone was bitter.

"True, we have never had an Indian at West Point, yet there have been negro youths sent there."

"This is a free country, Red Butterfly; as an Indian you certainly are an American, and can claim your rights."

"No, Captain Benteen, I have no such ambition, and I would not accept a cadetship if it was given me by the President, for I have other views in life."

"Just now I have a certain duty to perform, and that accomplished this wild life is at an end forever, I hope."

"Permit me also to say that I am beyond the age when a cadet can enter West Point, so I beg of you do not, as I see is your intention, force me to refuse your kindness."

"You do not seem so old, Red Butterfly, by a couple of years."

"I am though, sir; but now I have a report to make to you, which I neglected in the necessity of first telling you of the intended attack of the Sioux."

"Oh, yes, of your daring voyage, which they told me you had started upon?"

"Yes, sir."

"I supposed you had made no discovery and so come to the fort."

"No, sir, I did make a discovery, and if you will send for Lieutenant Ames and Buffalo Bill, I can explain to them the situation more fully, they being with me on the river."

An orderly was at once dispatched for the orderly and chief of scouts, and they soon put in an appearance at headquarters.

"Red Butterfly has a report to make which I wish you to hear, Lieutenant Ames, and you also, Cody," said Captain Benteen.

"I am very glad that Red Butterfly is here to make a report, for I confess I never expected to see him again," said Lieutenant Ames, while Buffalo Bill remarked:

"I have felt all the while that he had something to tell about his voyage on a raft, as he has kept so quiet about it."

"I have something to tell which will solve the mystery of the outlaws' lost trail, and perhaps be of considerable service to the Government," was Red Butterfly's modest response.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A SURPRISE.

"I ONLY wish to report, sir," said Red Butterfly, in his innocently cool way, which nothing disturbed, "that I took a voyage on a log-boat down the river, examining the shores closely as I went along."

"From what I discovered of the precipitous banks on either side, here and there rising into high cliffs, I know that no landing could have been made by the outlaws between the two fords, and no horses could have swum that distance."

"I swept beyond the lower ford, and the river seemed there to be flowing through a canyon, so wild and precipitous were the banks."

"The current became more rapid, and yet it seemed to rush to one side or the other, being comparatively sluggish in its movements on the opposite shore from where it was dashing along."

"I kept my boat in the swift current, and was the more assured that the outlaws could not have gone down the river even, or a stout raft, with so large a force."

"Toward sunset I sighted an island ahead, heavily timbered."

"The shores were rocky, and the river banks on either side were so wild and rugged that it seemed there was no approach to them."

"I poled over to the island, caught at an overhanging limb, made my boat fast and landed."

"I found that the island was in the shape of a V with the upper end up-stream."

"The lower ends formed a small, but quiet harbor, sheltered by timber, and right in here I discovered how it was that the outlaws had gone to the river at the ford and had not crossed over."

"It could not surely be a boat?" said Captain Benteen.

"It was, sir."

"But how could they get it up-stream?"

"It was a steamboat, sir."

"Butterfly, are you sticking squarely to the trail of facts?"

"Yes, sir, as I will guide the lieutenant there to see it."

"There is a sawmill engine aboard, a large stern-wheel, two rudders, and it is a cross between a flatboat and a canal-boat."

"It can carry a company of cavalry, I am sure, and though doubtless slow, will go up against that current."

"This is a remarkable discovery, indeed."

"Was there not a company that came here to establish a sawmill, some years ago, sir?"

"Yes, and the Indians drove them out."

"But they got out some lumber and built a boat, did they not, sir?"

"I did hear of that, but it was before I came to this part of the border, Captain Benteen," said Buffalo Bill.

"Well, that is the boat which the outlaws have gotten hold of."

"They evidently have a crew to work it, and when they wish to raid up toward Miner's Roost they send the engineer and his men to take it up the river, and retreating to it, of course their trail is lost at the ford."

"They have an ingenious contrivance for hauling a skiff ashore and back empty into the little harbor, so leave the boat deserted."

"But its furnaces were still warm when I got there, and I slept on board in the pilot-house, all night, and the next day went ashore in the skiff and hauled it back by the ropes to its place."

"Red Butterfly, you fairly amaze me," said Captain Benteen, while Lieutenant Ames remarked with a laugh:

"I am glad he is not chief of the Sioux, or he would run every one of us out of the Indian country."

"My father was head chief of the Sioux once," was the proud response of the youth; but instantly his manner changed, he seemed to regret his rather hasty remark, and said quickly:

"I believe, Captain Benteen, that you can bring that boat up the river to the fort, if you wish."

"If I wish? Why certainly I wish it, Red Butterfly, and I shall send a force at once with you to make the attempt."

"Have we any one in the fort who can run an engine, sir?" asked Lieutenant Ames.

"Ah! that is an important consideration, as we may have to capture the outlaw crew before we can move the boat."

"Do you know of any one, Cody?"

"Doctor Schufeldt, sir, is posted upon everything and I believe could do it."

"The very man, for I remember now he once did run an engine on a boat on the Upper Missouri when the engineer was killed by Indians."

"Orderly, ask Doctor Schufeldt to come to my quarters."

The assistant surgeon soon arrived, and hearing the situation at once volunteered for the work.

Lieutenant Ames was also to go along with a force, half of whom were to return with the horses of those who went on the boat, and Buffalo Bill and half a dozen men were also ordered to go on the expedition.

It was then discovered that Night Hawk George was an amateur engineer, and between Doctor Schufeldt and the scout, Captain Benteen felt sure of success, if the river permitted the boat to go up to the fort.

Red Butterfly offered his services as pilot, having already been down the river, and the expedition was soon made up and ready to start, when Buffalo Bill asked the Indian youth if he had followed the trail of the outlaws from the spot where they had landed from the boat?

"I went but a short distance, to see that they had headed down toward Jumping Off City."

"Then it came on to rain, and as I knew I could not get to the fort and return to the trail for days, when all traces would be washed away, I concluded that it would be no use to go further to see where the Buzzards would next roost."

"You were wise, Red Butterfly; but how did the outlaws get ashore from the boat?" asked Captain Benteen.

"Went in the skiff, sir, with their packs, and swam their horses across to the mainland."

"Ah, yes; but now, Lieutenant Ames, get away with all dispatch."

That afternoon the expedition started.

CHAPTER L.

THE NAVIGATORS.

It was near sunset when the expedition of navigators, under command of Lieutenant Ames, filed down a narrow canyon to the banks of the river, and came out at a wooded, rocky point nearly opposite the V-shaped island which Red Butterfly had discovered.

The youth had suggested the placing of a force upon the island to capture the outlaws, when they should again come there to use the boat, but after it was talked over it was decided that perhaps only the boat's crew would be sent, and

it might not be that they would use it again for six months or more.

Then, too, Captain Benteen could not spare the men from the fort for any length of time, as he well knew the danger of his position with all of his force ready for duty.

The party went into camp in the timber, and Red Butterfly lost no time in going to the tree and searching for the ropes that manipulated the skiff.

He found them as he had left them, and hauling on one, soon had the skiff coming across the river.

When it touched the shore, he got in with Lieutenant Ames, Surgeon Schufeldt, Buffalo Bill and Night Hawk George, and they crossed over to the island.

There was the steamboat, just as the Indian youth had reported it.

Ungainly and deserted, still it was there, and the surgeon and Night Hawk at once set to work examining the engine and crude machinery.

The boat was taken back by Buffalo Bill for more of the force, and by night all that were coming over as crew were on the island.

On the mainland, Lieutenant Vane and the soldiers who were to return to the fort were encamped, waiting to see the result of the adventure.

Wood was cut for the furnaces, in addition to what was found there, and steam was gotten up, and all anxiously watched Surgeon Schufeldt and Night Hawk Powell working with the engines.

"I believe it is Noah's Ark itself," said Surgeon Schufeldt, after he had given a thorough inspection.

"I never heard that Noah ever had a steam engine, Schufeldt," said Lieutenant Ames.

"It was the reporter's mistake if he didn't mention the engine in the report, for this is the identical ark, Ames," was the reply of the doctor as he persevered with his work.

At last steam rose in the gauge to a thirty-pound pressure, and with his hand upon the lever the doctor started the engine.

"I think I'll take a stroll to the other end of the island until you come down, Schufeldt," said Lieutenant Ames.

"Come down from where?" growled the doctor.

"The skies, for that thing is going to blow you all to the—"

"No, it won't blow us in that direction," laughed the doctor, and just then, in spite of the lieutenant's prediction, the heavy wheel began to turn and churn the water with a force that sent her bow hard against the shore.

"Take care, Schufeldt, you are pushing the island up-stream!"

"Stop her! back her! let go your anchors, or we'll have the island up at the fort soon," shouted the gay young lieutenant.

But all cheered, for the engines worked without a flaw.

Then the successful crew had their supper and retired for the night.

But bright and early the next morning all were up, breakfast quickly gotten rid of, fires were started in the furnaces, and the engineers went to work with two soldiers as firemen.

Red Butterfly took his stand at the wheel and had a smile of confidence upon his fine face.

"You are sure you can steer the old razzle-dazzle, Butterfly?" said Lieutenant Ames as he took his stand near him.

"Oh, yes, sir, for I have often steered a steam-yacht, and Doctor Schufeldt can help me with the engines, and Texas Jack has been a helmsman aboard ship he says, so we will go through all right."

Just then Texas Jack came to lend his aid at the wheel, Lieutenant Ames ordered the skiff hauled on deck, and this done, the lines to be cast loose.

The boat slowly drifted back with the current out of the little harbor until she was below the island.

All anxiously waited the critical moment, every eye upon the Indian youth at the wheel, now serving as pilot.

He gave the bell a pull to go ahead slowly, and the engines began to move, puff, puff, went the steam-pipes and the huge paddle-wheel astern began to turn.

At length its force counteracted the force of the current; all held their breath in silent expectation; another jingle of the bell, and the wheel turned more rapidly, and a cheer broke forth from the daring crew and the soldiers anxiously watching ashore as Lieutenant Ames, torturing the words of "My Maryland" to suit the occasion, shouted:

"She breathes! she burns! she goes! she goes! Razzle-Dazzle, my Razzle-Dazzle!"

The whoop of triumph from the crew was echoed by Lieutenant Vane and his men, and they watched the boat until she moved out for the island, and, heading up the river, slowly passed on out of sight, so very slowly, yet surely.

"Now to beat them to the fort," cried Lieutenant Vane.

"If that devil's ark is ever after getting there, sir," said Sergeant O'Toole, with an ill-omened shake of the head.

CHAPTER LI.

THE RED RIDER OF THE OVERLAND.

THE command under Lieutenant Vane lost no time on the march, and arrived at Fort Venture the morning after their breaking camp on the river-bank, where they had bidden farewell to what Lieutenant Ames had christened the Razzle-Dazzle.

They gave a shout when they learned that they had beaten the boat, but then anxiety took the place of triumph, for they remembered the many obstacles they would have to surmount who had ventured to bring the steamboat up to the fort.

A sunken rock, the breaking of the machinery, getting into a too-swift current, all might cause the wreck of the boat and sudden death of all on board.

Then the Indians might pick off the crew from the shore, if not too much alarmed at the contraption to fire upon it.

Again, the river might not be navigable all the way up to the fort, and the boat would have to be deserted.

All these dangers and obstacles began to cause anxiety for the daring crew, added to which, engineers, firemen, pilot and captain were but amateurs in the business of running a steamboat.

A lookout was kept constantly on the watch down the river for some sign of smoke to denote the coming of the bold navigators of an unknown river in a craft equally as known, certainly a nondescript.

But the day passed away and no smoke appeared.

"If she does not show up to-morrow morning I will send a force down the river-bank to look her up," Captain Benteen said.

Then he added:

"There are Ames, Doctor Schufeldt, my Indian youth, Buffalo Bill, Night Hawk, Texas Jack and a dozen others who are too valuable to lose—What is it, orderly?"

"A light reported far down the river, sir."

The captain seized his hat and hastened with his adjutant to a point of observation on the river-bank.

There had already assembled a large crowd, and all eyes were turned upon a light visible far down the river, visible only from the summit of the hill upon which the fort was situated.

"Light fires along the bank, men," called out the captain, and the soldiers hastened to obey.

There had been a wharf built that day, down at the river's edge, and all preparations made to receive the boat.

The light below grew brighter and brighter, larger and larger, and when suddenly two furnace-doors flew open for the firemen to throw in wood, a wild yell went up from the soldiers as the outlines of the nondescript craft were revealed.

"Adjutant, we must give her a salute with the guns," and the artillery was hastily brought to the bank and loaded.

Nearer and nearer came the boat, slowly but surely stemming the stream and heading straight for the fires that showed her pilot where to land.

"She's a dandy," said one.

"She breaks my heart to gaze upon her beauty and to feel she is not all mine own," a young officer said.

"It is Noah's Ark."

"It's a what-is-it."

"Is she moving?"

"She's making a mile an hour at least."

Then a youth, who was the son of the captain of infantry, chanted:

"The butterfly he hab de golden wing.

The hornet he hab de fiery sting,

The bed-bug he hab none,

But he get dere all de same."

A shout of laughter greeted this compliment to the steamboat, and then came the command of Captain Benteen to fire the salute.

The guns belched forth their hoarse welcome until thirteen shots had been fired, and just then a cheer came from the boat, whose prow was headed in for the wharf.

"The Indian's at the wheel," cried the adjutant, as the firelights revealed Red Butterfly as pilot, with Lieutenant Ames standing on one side, and the tall form of Buffalo Bill upon the other.

There were soldier firemen at the furnaces, the others on board being grouped forward on the bows.

Every eye was turned with interest upon the strange craft, and all felt that a great triumph had been made in getting her to the fort.

The lines were cast off and made fast, the furnace doors thrown open for the fires to cool off, the steam-valve opened and the crew sprung ashore, Surgeon Schufeldt and Night Hawk smoke-begrimed and worn out.

Captain Benteen met all at the landing, and had a warm grasp of the hand for each one, while he said:

"I congratulate you, Lieutenant Ames, upon your success."

"You do wrong, Captain Benteen, for I have been simply a figurehead, for the heroes are Red Butterfly, Schufeldt, Night Hawk, and the firemen."

"We made the run successfully, but tied up at night, and had to stop and cut wood, while we struck several places where it was nip and tuck whether the current or steam would triumph."

"In one place we were just two hours going half a mile, but here we are, sir, and the Razzle-Dazzle got here all the same."

"But, Captain Benteen, that Indian boy has the coolest nerve I ever saw, for he never lost his grip no matter what the danger, and he is to me a wonder, a greater mystery than ever."

"I only wish I could keep him from his fool-hardy resolve to go as Pony Rider."

"No, sir, his mind is made up on that point, and I really believe he has some secret motive for taking the risk."

"I am sure of it; but here he comes," and Captain Benteen again congratulated Red Butterfly upon his success.

"I could have done nothing, sir, had it not been for Doctor Schufeldt and Night Hawk; but won't Quantrel and his men be surprised when they find their steamboat gone, sir?"

"I would like to see their faces, Red Butterfly."

"If they only go upon another raid up to Miner's Roost, they could be pushed hard to the river, their usual way of retreat, and finding their crew had no boat there to meet them, and soldiers across the ford to check them, with a force in their rear I think they could all be taken, sir."

"Red Butterfly, I would give a year's pay to get them in that situation," earnestly said Captain Benteen.

"It may be, sir, that it can be arranged, and as I wish to start on my Pony Rider run to-morrow, sir, I will try and see if we can entrap the outlaws in some way, by a bait to carry them up to Miner's Roost."

"You still stick to the idea of riding Pony Express?"

"Oh, yes, sir, certainly."

"I am sorry to hear it."

"I go through, sir, never fear."

"I have my horses and outfit at Jumping Off City, and will go there with Sunset Sam."

"Then I will report to the company's agent there, sir, and be ready to come through with all speed, for I have splendid horses, and the two I captured from the outlaws are good ones."

"I see that you are determined, Red Butterfly, to ride."

"Yes, sir, if I could not go as military courier I would report to the Overland company for mail-carrier between Jumping Off City and Hard Times."

"In that case, I can say no more to urge you against it, and your pouch will be ready for you to-night, for you to leave at dawn."

"Thank you, sir," and Red Butterfly saluted politely.

The next morning, mounted upon the horse he had captured from Quantrel's corral, he flew out of the fort on his perilous run as a rider of the Overland.

CHAPTER LII.

SUNSET SAM LEARNS A SECRET.

THERE was not a man at the fort who knew better than did Red Butterfly the great danger he ran in riding the Overland.

The mail-couriers who went through from the fort to Miner's Roost, before the coaches ran to Hard Times, were the very men the outlaws were accustomed to pick off.

They always looked upon them as carrying important papers and money, and those who "held them up" were not wont to show them the mercy which the Red Buzzards generally exhibited toward the drivers of the Overland coaches.

It was seldom that a halt was called by voice, for the crack of a rifle and a bullet through the brain and heart was the manner of bringing a military courier to a stop.

Robbed, his pouch taken, his horse led away, and the body left where it had fallen, was the way the army riders were treated by those who lay in wait for them.

And thus had fallen twelve good men and brave, shot down from ambush, since Fort Venture had been established, and it was no wonder that there was a terrible dread of going as rider along a trail so fatal.

All this did Red Butterfly know when he asked for the position of rider of the Overland.

Nothing could turn him from his purpose, and the next morning he had come to the Plaza of the fort, ready for his ride.

It was early, but many of the people were up to see him start, and he came out of his quarters looking fresh and confident.

He bowed to those who greeted him, threw the pouches over the saddle, strapped them on and leaped upon his horse, which was anxious for the trail.

With a wave of the hand he dashed away, and an officer watching him from the lookout, and holding his watch to time him, said:

"He has disappeared, making the three miles to the ridge in just thirteen minutes."

On his way sped the youth, slacking his speed as soon as he got out of sight of the fort, and bringing his horse down to a steady, sweeping gallop.

Five miles had been passed over, when suddenly he branched off from the trail, turned down a canyon and went skurrying along as before.

"If they wait for me on a trail, they must know which one I am going to take," he muttered to himself, in a grim sort of way.

"I know this country too well to take the same trail twice, and I do not intend to be shot from ambush."

He held on at the same pace, sparing his horse only up and down hill, when he would spring to the ground and walk.

When he came to very rough ground he did the same, and so his horse was greatly aided in his hard run.

On, on he went until he again wheeled into the trail as the first cabin of Hard Times came into view.

Like an arrow he flew past the camps up to the Hard Times Hotel, where Sunset Sam's coach stood ready for the road.

He was greeted with a yell by the crowd, who recognized the new Pony Rider, the Indian who had dared face the dangers of the fatal trails.

"Bravo for Number Thirteen!"

"The Red Rider of the Overland!" cried the landlord of the hotel, while Sunset Sam called out:

"And on time to the minute, pard."

"Has yer been shot at?"

"Oh no; but I go through with you on the coach this time, Sam, for I wish to get a horse at Miner's Roost and have him ready for my return."

"Right you are, pard, so mount the box, and we go it alone, as ther Buzzards has scared all travel off the trail."

The young Indian took his pouches and sprung up to the box, followed by Sunset Sam, and the horses went off, while the crowd cheered the daring driver and Pony Rider.

They had ridden along a few miles, conversing upon ordinary topics, when Red Butterfly said:

"See here, Sam, I believe I can trust you."

"Waal, if yer don't, ther walkin' is good, and this box hain't no place fer yer, pard."

"I'll ride I think, as I am going to trust you with a secret, Sam."

"It's safe, for I hain't no woman."

"Well, you must keep dark and stand ready to help me out and I'll be on hand when you need a friend."

"You've got thar already, pard, and ef I kin do anything to return ther kindness, just call me and I'll respond to yer play."

"Well, Sam, I came out here for a purpose, I came for revenge, and my game is Kit Quantrel and his band."

"I am riding Pony Express only to learn all I can about the ways of the Red Buzzards, to discover their spies at the stations and mining-camps, and to so get a web about them that when I spring my trap they cannot escape."

"I see, I see, and you're ther dandy ter do it, young pard, and I'm with yer heart and hand."

"I feel that, and I wish to get another good pard or two, one at Miner's Roost and one at Jumping Off City."

"Pard, yer don't know who ter trust, and ye'll hev ter go mighty slow, fer ther man yer tackle might be ther spy himself."

"Very true."

"But my idee is thet thet Fightin' Parson are yer mau, fer between you and me I think he is on to ther same leetle game as you be."

"Thank you—the parson is my man," said Red Butterfly earnestly, as though influenced with what Sunset Sam had said.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE PARSON IN PERIL.

THE coach ran into Miner's Roost on time, and was greeted by its usual crowd, though it was on the up run that it received the greatest welcome.

Sunset Sam had told Red Butterfly that he would give him ample time to get a horse, and he bargained with Jerry Thomas, the landlord, for an animal he owned and which the driver knew all about.

The money was paid cash, and Jerry was told to have him ready for the up-run of the Pony Rider, who would return on horseback and not by coach.

"Whar's ther Fightin' Parson, Jerry?" asked Sunset Sam as he went out to mount his box.

"I hav'n't seen him for a couple of days, so I guess he's off trailing up sinners somewhere," was the answer.

So the coach rolled on its way with Sunset Sam and Red Butterfly again alone.

Travel was indeed light on that branch of the Overland, and the coach never went out that the miners did not predict its being held up, and the death of the driver.

As the coach wound around a spur of the mountain the eyes of Red Butterfly suddenly fell upon a scene that escaped the vision of Sunset Sam.

He made no sign, uttered no word, until the coach had rounded the bend, and then said quickly:

"Keep on until out of hearing, Sam, and there wait for me."

"There's trouble back yonder."

Before Sunset Sam could utter a word he had leaped to the ground and bounded into the timber.

"What on 'arth are up now, and what has he seen?"

"Waal, I'll do as he tells me if I break a trace," and the coach continued on its way, the creaking of the brake against the wheel filling the air with a discordant sound.

Up the steep hillside went the Indian with quick, noiseless step and soon came to a huge boulder.

He heard voices and crept along more cautiously, to the next moment appear upon the scene that had attracted his attention.

The nature of the ground had prevented the approach of the coach from being heard by three men over among the rocks off the trail, and they had just time to crouch down and let it go by while they remained hidden.

Two of the men thus crouching held a revolver each at the head of the third man, who was bound hands and feet, and ordered him to keep silent under pain of instant death.

The keen eyes of the Indian youth had taken in the situation and yet had not appeared to see, for he uttered no word and the coach rolled on.

Once it was passed, the two men gave a sigh of relief.

"It were a close call, Ross," said one.

"Waal, too close fer me ter wish ter risk it ag'in."

"I almost thought thet red-skin on ther box seen us, but he didn't."

"No, or he'd 'a' shouted."

"But let us git."

"And what are you to do with me?" said the man who was bound hands and feet.

"Take yer to ther chief, fer he sent us for yer specially."

"I am in your power, so do as you please," was the cool reply of the prisoner.

"Waal, git up now and we'll untie yer legs so you kin walk, for we hain't no idee o' carryin' yer."

"Our horses are over the ridge yonder, and yours we tuk back in ther bushes out o' sight, and well for us it were thet we did do so."

"You are of course Red Buzzards?" said the prisoner.

"We is jist them birds, pard."

"And therefore you love gold?"

"Waal, we does."

"I will pay you well to let me go."

"Ther chief would kill us."

"He would not know it."

"Waal, now, you don't know him if yer says so, for he may hev his eyes onto us at this blessed minute."

"What does he want with me?"

"To kill you of course, for he don't show no mercy, except to one man, and he keeps him to find out a secret he knows."

"You refer to the man he kidnapped from Miner's Roost?"

"Thet same; but we must git, for we don't want to run no more risks like that stage-coach a-running upon us as it did."

"Come, follow us."

"Hands up! I have you covered!"

The words rung out in a tone that meant all that was said.

The speaker had seemed to drop from the clouds right down before the group of three men, for he had leaped from the top of the rock.

In each hand he held a revolver, and each of the two outlaws was covered, the weapons were cocked, the forefinger of right and left hands on the triggers.

There was nothing to do but obey, for the weapons of the road-agents had been returned to their belts.

They were fairly caught, and they did not like the deadly glitter in the eyes that seemed to look each one in the face.

So their hands went up, and then came the order:

"Right about face!"

They obeyed.

Stepping up behind them, the Red Butterfly took their revolvers from their belts with one hand, while he held them covered with the other.

"Down on your faces, both of you."

"Quick!"

The outlaws obeyed.

"Now, parson, I can untie that lariat with one hand and still keep those fellows covered."

This he did, and then said:

"Now please take the same lariat and bind those two men together, hands and feet, and the other hands behind them, leaving one leg free so they can march and keep step side by side."

The parson, for he it was who had been the outlaws' prisoner, silently obeyed, and he did his work well.

"Now if you will get the horses, parson, and come on down the trail, you will find the coach there, waiting."

"I will march these gentlemen to the coach."

The parson walked up into the timber, while the Red Butterfly ordered the two outlaws to march and started them down the trail.

"What yer goin' ter do with us, young Injun gent?" asked one of the prisoners.

"Kill you," was the laconic response.

Just as Sunset Sam began to get anxious at the long stay of his Indian pard, Red Butterfly came in sight, and before him marched his two prisoners, the left hand of one bound to the right of the other, and the same as regarded their feet, while the other hands were drawn behind them and tightly secured, the outer leg of each alone being free.

CHAPTER LIV.

PARDS FOR LIFE.

"WAAL, what in ther mischief has yer got thar, Pard Butterfly?" cried Sunset Sam, as he saw the young Indian and his prisoners coming down the trail.

"Two Red Birds I bagged up the hill, just now, Sam."

"Waal, it do look so; but if they is really honerary Red Buzzards, jist let me kill 'em if you please."

"Certainly."

"Don't yer think it would be a waste o' powder, pard, ter shoot 'em?" said Sam, putting his revolver back in its holster.

"Yes, rope is cheaper."

"Thet's so; I'll hang 'em, arter givin' 'em a free ride at ther comp'ny's expense to Jumping Off City."

"Yes; I was going to ask you to give them a seat in the coach."

"Won't they git away?"

"Not when I tie them well; but here comes the parson."

"Ther parson?"

"Yes."

"Waal, ef it hain't him, jist call me a dog."

The parson came riding down the trail, mounted upon his own horse and leading the two belonging to the outlaws.

"Well, Brother Sam, how are you?"

"Middlin' happy, Gospil Sharp, seein' as my red pard here hev jist tuk in some game."

"He just saved my life, for they meant to kill me."

"Kill you, parson?"

"Yes, Brother Sunset; they lariatied me as I was going along the trail, and, my horse leaping ahead, I fell heavily and was stunned; so they had me bound when I came to my senses."

"They were sent to capture me by their chief, Quantrel, they told me, and his purpose was to kill me; so, my young friend, you have saved me from death, and from this day we are pards for life."

And the parson grasped the hand of Red Butterfly most warmly, while one of the outlaws called out:

"It hain't so! we hain't no outlaws, and don't know nothin' about Quantrel and the Red Buzzards."

"Thet galoot fell from his horse and got hurt, and we picked him up and—"

"Ah, shet up, yer howlin' coyotes! and, Butterfly, jist s'arch 'em and see ef they hain't got ther red masks along," said Sunset Sam.

"No, I will not search them."

And the Indian drew back.

"I will; for the Scriptures say—"

"Search and ye shall find."

And, with this, the parson did search the two prisoners, and upon each one was found the red mask of the outlaw band.

"Put 'em in ther hearse, parson, and I'll give 'em their last ride 'fore they has a rope-dance in Jumping-Off City."

"Won't yer go along, parson, on my invite?"

"No, thank you, Brother Sam; I must return to Miner's Roost," said the parson.

And, as he held out his hand to Red Butterfly, he continued:

"I wish to see you on your return, my friend."

"I'll stop on my trip up, sir, for the hurry is only on the down run to catch the main line coaches."

The prisoners had been aided into the coach by the parson, their horses were unsaddled and hitched behind, the saddles thrown on top, and then Red Butterfly mounted again with Sunset Sam and the coach rolled on, while the man who had just escaped death from the pluck of the Indian youth rode slowly on his way toward Miner's Roost.

There were two stations on the trail to Jumping Off City where Sunset Sam had a relay of horses, one at a small mining-camp, and the other at a stage halting-place where there dwelt only a stock-tender.

At the first of these the outlaws' horses were left by Red Butterfly, and the prisoners carried on.

"They are both good animals, Sam, and they will serve me instead of my own at Jumping Off City, giving me one of those as an extra at Miner's Roost, where I will need another more than anywhere else," said the Indian rider.

"You is right, and two horses at each relay for you won't be any too many, as you will have ter hoof it pretty peert, and give 'em all ther work they kin do," responded Sam.

It was on the very minute of time that Sam

drove up to the Free and Easy Inn at Jumping Off City, and was received with a hoop-la by the crowd.

The Indian youth was at once recognized by the landlord, with whom he had stopped for a few days, and who had his horses and traps in keeping for him.

When Sunset Sam hauled his prisoners out of the coach with no gentle hand, the crowd looked on and wondered.

"Who is they Sam?" asked one.

"Waal, pards, they is two Red Buzzards thet peert Injun pard o' mine picked up on ther road, jist as they hed captured a parson, ther Fighting Parson o' Miner's Roost, and meant ter take him to their chief ter hang, for he sent 'em arter him."

"Yer has judges and juries here ter sell, so I tains 'em over fer trial and tells yer thet they is both guilty and desarnes hangin', while ef rope is high here, I kin lend yer some."

"Who takes 'em?"

A perfect howl went up from the crowd and a rush was made for the prisoners, for the miners of Jumping Off City had all suffered from the robberies of Quantrel and his band.

Half an hour after, when Red Butterfly came in from having a look at his horses, Sunset Sam said:

"It's did, pard."

"What, Sam?"

"They is tryin' 'em now."

"Of course they are guilty."

"Oh, ther crowd know'd thet, so hanged 'em fu'st, but is tryin' 'em now ter hev things accordin' ter law."

CHAPTER LV.

ALLIES IN SECRET.

THE East and West-bound coaches of the Overland were due soon after Sunset Sam's arrival from the branch trail.

When they drove into Jumping Off City, the passengers going west were startled by beholding two forms swinging in midair before the hotel, and learned that they were outlaws captured by an Indian Pony Rider of the Overland.

The passengers on the coach going east were also somewhat horrified at the sight, but they had come through a country where scenes of bloodshed and tragedies were of daily occurrence, and the edge of their horror at such sights had been taken off.

When Sunset Sam started on his return run, Red Butterfly was ready with his mail-pouches, and, having seen the manager of the Pony Express, had been engaged by him on the branch-line up to Hard Times, with the privilege of doing the duty as military courier from there on to Fort Venture.

Behind the coach trotted Red Butterfly's three horses, and he had his traps aboard, intending to make Fort Venture his home quarters, as Captain Benteen and Buffalo Bill had strongly urged him to do so.

The horses were stationed along the trail as Red Butterfly deemed best, and he knew that on the next run he would not enjoy Sunset Sam's company, but have to go through flying on horseback and taking all chances alone.

When the coach arrived at Miner's Roost, Sunset Sam told his story of the hanging of the two outlaws, the parson having already made known all about his capture and his daring rescue by Red Butterfly, so that the red-skin rider got a rousing welcome from the miners.

Just as the coach was ready to start, the parson appeared and said he was going as passenger up to Hard Times, and leaving his horse to follow behind the coach, which he did as faithfully as a dog would have done, he got into the stage.

After leaving the camps behind, he called out to Red Butterfly to get inside also, which the rider did.

"Now, my young friend, I have something to say to you of importance," said the parson.

"I know that you are beset with manifold dangers, and I am sure you came out to this wild land from a deeper motive than to ride Pony Express."

"You are a Sioux, and yet are not the friend of your people, or they at least are not your friends."

"I know your people well, I speak your language, and I feel that there is some barrier that divides you from them and made you content to go with the pale-faces."

"You went East and have received an education, you are refined and of a noble nature, and you are casting all that you have learned behind you to come here and risk life in some wild venture, and which I believe revenge is at the bottom of."

"Am I not right?"

"You are, sir."

"My observation," continued the parson, "causes me to believe that the objects of your enmity are the outlaws of Quantrel."

"Again you are right."

"Now your daring and successful playing of the Phantom Stage-Coach I witnessed, for I was on the trail that night, and yours is the credit for it, I know, and it told me that you aimed at Quantrel and his men."

"Now I wished to say to you that I owe you

my life, for I was caught napping and you saved me from what would have ended in my death, if I could not have escaped by my own exertions."

"Trusting you, I will tell you that I am playing a part, too."

"Playing a part, sir?"

"Yes, I am playing a game to win, and my adversaries are the Red Buzzards."

"I am on their track, and shall never leave them until they kill me or I trail them down."

"I am with you, then, sir, heart and hand, yes, and life if need be," fervently said Red Butterfly.

"I felt that, and I therefore speak as I do."

"Now I gave chase alone to Quantrel when he ran off with Sam's coach, for I hoped to catch him then; but I failed."

"I took his unfortunate victim to my home and cared for him."

"Daniel Darwin?"

"Yes, poor fellow, I did all I could to save him, and though he lived his reason left him."

"And, crazed as he was, Quantrel came to my cabin, killed one whom I left there as nurse for the wounded man, and bore him away."

"I have vowed to rescue poor Darwin, and avenge him."

"And I will make the same vow," said the Indian youth, in a voice that almost startled the parson, so full was it of hate.

But he said quickly:

"Then we will keep our vow, for together we can do much, though no one other than Sunset Sam must know that we are allies."

"I understand, sir."

"I will give you my signals, my plans to leave a slip of paper with news, whether from you to me, or from me to you."

"Sam also must know some of our plans, and between the three of us, we can lay our traps, and spring them at the proper time."

"If you need aid when you are near the fort, seek Buffalo Bill and any of his men, for they are true as steel."

"I well know that, sir."

"I will continue my still hunt, you do all you can, and will yet get our grip upon the throats of Quantrel and his men."

"Here are all signals and a map, with directions, and study it out at your leisure, then destroy it."

"When Sunset Sam returns to Miner's Roost, I will explain all that is necessary for him to know, to aid us in our plans, and from time to time we will secretly meet upon the trails, for this paper will tell you how to find me."

"Do we understand each other now, Red Butterfly?"

"I am sure that we do, sir, and some day you shall know me better."

"Then I will leave you here, for I do not care to go into Hard Times in the coach."

A halt was called, and after a short talk with Sunset Sam the parson mounted his horse and branched off of the trail, while the coach pulled on for Hard Times, with Red Butterfly again riding upon the box.

The moment the coach reached Hard Times, the red rider mounted his horse and sped away on the trail for Fort Venture.

CHAPTER LVI.

A CHARMED LIFE.

"THERE comes the Red Butterfly!"

The cry came from Lieutenant Vane at the fort, as he stood on the watch-tower gazing out over the plains, and beheld a horseman dash into sight.

On he came like the wind, straight as an arrow for the fort, his horse stretched out at his greatest speed.

The cry of the officer had been heard by many and the news spread like wildfire:

"The Pony Rider was not killed, for he is coming."

On, on he swept, and when he dashed into the stockade gate, officers, scouts and soldiers were there to receive him, and wild were the hurrahs that rung out for him.

He waved his hat in recognition, swept on to the Plaza, drew rein suddenly in front of the adjutant's office, and handing to him the leather pouches said politely:

"I have to report my arrival, sir."

"And I have to congratulate you upon your safety, Red Butterfly," said the adjutant, just as Captain Benteen came in and said:

"Well, Butterfly, I am offering big odds that you will never be killed by bullet."

"Did you see any outlaws on the trip?"

"I was so lucky, sir, as to bag two Red Birds who had the parson in their claws," and Red Butterfly told the story in his modest way.

"And the prisoners?"

"Sunset Sam gave them a free ride to Jumping Off City, and the crowd hanged them first and tried them afterward."

"Yes, and many a guilty wretch would get his deserts if our courts did the same thing, though I suppose the innocent would suffer too," said the adjutant.

After several days' rest, the Red Rider again left the fort on his ride, and, as before, dodged the trails where he deemed danger was lurking, flew into Hard Times only a minute late, and

changing his horse, with a wave of the hand to Sunset Sam, who was just pulling out, went tearing along the trail to Miner's Roost.

He was on time to the second at Overland Lodge, and on a fresh horse raced down the mountain toward Jumping Off City.

His two relays were made promptly, and he dashed up to the door of the company's office in that delectable place "just on time," and the agent so put him down on the books.

As he was on his run up he met Sunset Sam and drew rein for a word with him, the two holding a whispered conference, as there were two passengers in the coach.

Riding through Death Canyon, he halted at the marble cross placed there in memory of the stage-coach tragedy, as has been told, and pushing away the leaves, found a small tin box.

"No letter this time from the parson," he said, as he replaced it as it was before, and, mounting his horse, sped on once more at the same rapid pace.

Through Miner's Roost, again through Hard Times, and once more on the fatal trail for Fort Venture he flew.

Suddenly, when but a few miles from the fort, he drew rein.

The rattle of revolvers reached his ears off to the left, and wheeling his horse across some meadow-land he dashed in that direction.

Over a hill he went, right upon an unequal duel of one man fighting three.

The one man was at bay behind a group of rocks, and his horse lay dead near by.

The three men had also taken shelter behind boulders, and Red Butterfly noted in a glance that a fourth man lay dead behind his barrier, while one of the three seemed wounded.

He came in their rear, and the first they knew of his coming, for they heard no hoof-falls on the soft ground, was a shot that laid one low.

The other sprung to his feet and fired, but Red Butterfly fired at the same time.

The outlaw's shot pierced the head of the Red Rider's horse and killed him, but Butterfly, nimble as a cat, lighted on his feet, and the shot he fired brought down his man, just as the one who had been at bay fighting odds rushed upon the other and called out:

"Hands up!"

"Ho, Mr. Cody, you were having a picnic all to yourself, I see."

"Yes, and you saved it from being a picnic for those fellows, Red Butterfly."

"I came to patrol the trail for you and ran upon their ambush, which they had placed for the Red Rider."

"I'll send you help from the fort—good-by," and having quickly transferred his saddle and bridle from his dead horse to one of the outlaws' horses, staked out a short distance off, the Red Rider dashed on as before.

But when he reported Buffalo Bill in need of aid on the trail, and a force was sent to his relief with all speed, the Red Rider went with it as guide.

With plenty of time to spare, Buffalo Bill had mastered the situation very readily after the departure of the Red Butterfly.

Two of the outlaws were dead and two were wounded, and the latter the chief of scouts looked to first, very humanely caring for their wounds as best he could.

Then he secured them so that escape was impossible and brought up the three horses belonging to them, when he removed his saddle and bridle from his own dead steed and placed it on one of the three animals he had led to the spot, Red Rider having gone off on the fourth.

The two prisoners were then placed on one horse, the two bodies on another, and Buffalo Bill was just mounting to leave the scene which had so nearly proven fatal to him, when the Red Rider dashed up with a party of cavalry that had come to his relief, and the soldiers learned from the scout that he owed his escape to the Indian youth, for the modesty of Butterfly had not allowed him to say as much.

"And that boy bears a charmed life," added Buffalo Bill, and in this all agreed with him, the belief gaining ground with each ride the daring young Indian made over the trail so fatal to so many others.

CHAPTER LVII.

A STRANGER VISITS MINER'S ROOST.

THE Overland Lodge Saloon was in full blast when a stranger, who had arrived in Miner's Roost just after sunset, entered and looked around him with the interest of one who was in a strange place.

He was well dressed, for his mines at least, wore good boots and a black slouch hat, and had the air of one who was satisfied with himself and the world in general.

He had a beard some weeks old that gave him rather a grizzled look, though he was fine-featured and appeared to be well-to-do.

His slouch hat was drawn down well over his eyes, and he wore spectacles, as though near-

It was not very long before he had an invitation to play, for there were miner sharpers on the lookout for any one whom they thought they could fleece.

If they could beat them at a game of cards it

was an easier way of making money than by gold-digging, unless they had an uncommonly rich mine, and if the games went against the sharpers then they could draw out.

"Yer is a stranger in these parts, pard, I take it," said Nat Sykes, whose wound, given him by the Pistol Parson, had healed, and who, with his inseparable pard, Lasso Dave, had taken in the stranger at a glance and decided to "try him on."

"Yes, I never was here before, sir," said the stranger politely.

"Didn't come with Sunset Sam?"

"Beg pardon, who is that?"

"The stage-driver of the Overland."

"Don't you know Sunset Sam?"

"I haven't that honor."

"Then you didn't come by stage?"

"No, I came along the stage-trail, on horse-back."

"I see; putting up at the Overland Lodge I take it?"

"Yes."

"Tom-and-Jerry feeds well."

"I had an excellent supper."

"Goin' ter stay some time?"

"I do not know, for I am prospecting a little about here."

"It's lucky the Red Buzzards didn't catch you."

"Do you mean a band of outlaws I have heard called by that name?"

"Sure."

"No; I saw no one on the trail."

"Maybe you play a little?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"Me and my pard, here—what's your name, stranger?"

"Frank Courtney, sir."

"That sounds as fine as a novel name; but let me interdoce my pard, Lasso Dave, one o' ther squarest white men that ever drew trigger."

The stranger shook hands cordially with Lasso Dave, and then Nat Sykes proposed "a little game jist ter kill time."

The stranger was agreeable, a table was found, and the three sat down, Lasso Dave calling another "pard" to join them.

Somehow the stranger handled cards most delfly.

He won game after game, and his adversaries grew uneasy, until a man came up and whispered something to Nat Sykes.

Nat whispered to Lasso Dave, who in turn passed the whisper to his comrade, but the stranger was not let into the little secret, and he knew that he was the object of their comments.

Suddenly, the man who had just spoken to Nat Sykes called out:

"Pards all, I says thet fine bird thar are a Red Buzzard, none other than Kit Quantrel himself!"

The announcement was a startling one.

Every man who was seated sprung to his feet in an instant, and all who were crowding around looked on at the scene.

Those at the table with the stranger all stood up and had him covered with their revolvers.

As for the stranger, he sat perfectly cool and asked, politely:

"What is this all about, men?"

"I says you is Kit Quantrel!" shouted his accuser.

"You are a fool, as I can prove."

"Prove it!" yelled many voices.

"What proof do you wish?"

"Who is yer?"

"My name is Courtney, and I am a prospector, going through this country looking for gold."

"Who knows yer here in Miner's Roost?"

"I don't know a soul here."

"Then what proof can you give as to who you are?"

"I have my papers with me."

"Show 'em up."

"To a responsible party, yes, but not to the crowd."

"He looks like what I has heard Kit Quantrel favor," said one.

"I has seen Quantrel and thet is ther man," his accuser said.

"I wish to know if there are men here who will listen to reason?" said the stranger.

A number stepped forward ready to be accused of being such men.

"I will show my papers to any three of you the crowd may select, and stand by their judgment as to the truth of my statements and the falsity of that man's charge against me."

Three men were quickly selected by the crowd, one of whom was Tom-and-Jerry of the Overland Lodge.

The parson was called loudly for, but failed to respond, and then the stranger was led to a table, apart from the crowd and told to give proof that he was not Kit Quantrel, the chief of the band of Red Buzzards.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE PARSON SPEAKS.

THE stranger was as cool as an icicle, in spite of the angry eyes turned upon him and the crowd of wild men he faced.

He was pale, yes, but he had a nerve of iron,

and there was no quiver in his voice, no tremor of the hand as he prepared for the ordeal before him.

"It seems that an unfortunate resemblance to some noted outlaw chief has gotten me into trouble, gentlemen, so you are to be my judges, I believe, as to whether I show you proof that my accuser yonder has made a grave error or not," said the stranger.

"He's cool about it," said some one in the crowd.

"Yes, we will hear what you have to say and see your proofs," said Jerry Thomas.

"Well, gentlemen, I am a prospector from the East, and am in the service of a gold-mining company, who have sent me to look for one through this part of the country and to examine the gold dug here."

"What's ther name of yer comp'ny?" asked one of the trio of "judges."

"The Mineral Mining Company of New York."

"Waal, whar did yer come from when yer come here?"

"I came along the stage-trail from a queer place known as Jumping Off City."

"Why didn't yer come by coach?"

"I preferred to be independent, so purchased a horse for myself."

"You carry mighty fine weepens."

"A man is a fool not to do so in this country."

"Yer talk sense now, pard; but show us yer proofs."

"Well, here is my watch with my name in it."

They took the handsome watch and closely examined it, but, like *Oliver Twist*, they wanted more proof.

"Here are some letters addressed to me to Jumping Off City, and this one has a check in it, you see, for five hundred dollars, from the company I represent."

They examined the letters, the check, and then asked for further proof.

"I have only this seal ring with my name in it."

The three judges looked at the ring.

Then they stepped apart and held a consultation, the stranger wholly unmoved.

At length the trio turned to him, and Jerry Thomas said:

"Pard, I'm willing to take the proofs as genuine, but these two say that you could 'a' robbed a man by the name of Frank Courtney and have all these things with you."

"That's so!" shouted the crowd.

"He's Quantrel! I'll stake my life on it!" yelled his accuser.

"Then let the crowd hold you prisoner while I send for proof, and if you are wrong, hang you; if I am Quantrel, as you call the man, hang me," said the stranger.

"I hain't no fool if you is, for you is a fool to come here as you have."

"Pards, I says that man is Quantrel!"

"Hang him! hang him!" yelled the crowd, moving toward him.

The stranger appealed to his judges.

"Will you three men, after the proof I have given you of my identity, see me banged by this mob?"

"I say, pards, let up and give the man a chance," called out Jerry Thomas.

"How do the judges stand?" asked a voice in the crowd.

"I is against the proofs," said one.

"Ditto me," cried the other.

"I am in favor of the prisoner being cleared," shouted Jerry Thomas.

"The majority rules—the man hangs!" yelled the accuser of the stranger.

The crowd moved forward, and the stranger was at their mercy, for the judges had his belt of arms and all.

"The man hangs!" yelled the crowd, preparing for a rush.

"The man does not hang without proof!"

The deep voice silenced the noise, and the parson stepped before the maddened crowd.

All knew him, all knew his deadly aim.

He seemed unarmed, but many knew that he was not.

His calm, emotionless face fronted them, and his eyes alone flashed as they peered through his spectacles.

"My brothers, you are all wrong," he said.

"We is all right! That man is Kit Quantrel," cried the one who had accused him.

"You make the charge, Brother Darby!"

"I does."

"I heard and saw what passed, for I was just outside by the window, and Brother Sykes and Lasso Dave led this stranger into a game to

"He beat them at their own game, and Brother Darby accuses him of being Quantrel."

"You three gentlemen examined the evidence and two of you say hang him."

"I say no!"

"I say yes!" shouted Darby.

"Well, Brother Darby, I'll agree to hang him if he is, and you if he is not."

"Do you agree?"

"No! hang that man!"

"Men, don't let that Gospel guide bully yer,

for I knows what I talks about, and that man are Quantrel," shouted Darby.

"Does you lead, Pard Darby?" cried a voice.

"I does! come on!"

The parson stooped quickly, and when he rose he had a revolver in each hand, drawn from his boot-tops.

"Brother Darby, are you prepared to die?"

And his voice was calm but threatening.

"Come on, pards! you, Nat Sykes and Lasso Dave, for I let you in with me in the reward."

"Hang him!" roared the crowd, and those in safety in the rear shoved those in front.

There were three quick shots, and three men dropped dead, and as the crowd surged back and the smoke rose, all saw that the parson had fired, and his aim had been sure.

They also saw that Jerry Thomas had handed the stranger his weapons, had his own drawn, while the two judges now decided to protect the stranger.

"My brothers, don't crowd the mourner's bench, unless you are prepared to die."

The parson's voice was full of warning, and, as though to impress the crowd the more with their danger, a slender form suddenly bounded through the window, and a cheerful voice said:

"You appear to be in trouble, Parson Paul, so I chip in with my little gun to back you up."

It was Red Butterfly, the Pony Rider, and a yell went up from the crowd at sight of the popular Indian youth, while a voice called out:

"Let up, pards! the parson has the call, and Red Butterfly holds a hand full of trumps ter play with him."

"I thank you, brothers in sin," said the parson, meekly.

And he led the stranger out of the saloon, while the Pony Rider, with a wave of the hand, leaped through the window again and was gone.

CHAPTER LIX.

A DOUBT.

THE stranger had made a narrow escape, and he knew it.

He fully realized, as he entered the Overland Lodge with the parson on one side and the landlord on the other that he had just had the closest call of his life from death.

Had the parson not "had something to say," he would have then been a dead man, the life choked out of him by a furious crowd.

The deadly aim of the parson astounded him, and, in thanking him for his life, he said:

"You are the dearest shot I ever saw, reverend sir."

"It is wrong to kill, sir, except when to save a life demands a life, and then I shoot straight; but the best shot I ever saw is that Indian youth, whose coming to your aid helped out more than all else."

"Had he opened they knew each shot was a death-knell."

"Who is he?"

"An Indian boy who rides the Overland Pony Express."

"Where is he?"

"He was due here just as the trouble occurred, and changing horses, saw it and leaped in through the window."

"When it was over he went on his way, for he rides like lightning and loses no time."

"I wanted to thank him for his goodness to me."

"I will tell him you appreciate it, sir; but now let me give you a piece of advice."

"Certainly, sir."

"I have saved your life now, but you will be killed as surely as you remain in Miner's Roost."

"I will leave it then."

"Go at once, or rather as soon as I can arrange for you to depart in peace."

"I thank you."

"I will go back into the saloon and let it be thought that you will remain here."

"When I come out I will take you to my cabin, where I will ask the Landlord, Brother Jerry, to lead your horse at once."

"Then I will guide you by a trail over the mountains back to the Overland, and when next you come to Miner's Roost bring all the proof you can that you are who you say you are, and come by Sunset Sam's coach."

"I thank you, parson, and will follow your advice."

The parson now returned to the Overland Saloon, as one of the miners expressed it:

"To see about his dead."

The bodies had been removed to the cabin of Nat Sykes, and the ripple of fury which had passed over the crowd had disappeared.

The parson was greeted with a yell as he passed through, but he did not stay long, and returned to the hotel.

"That are ther kind o' parson they ought ter hev in ther army, pards, for he'd send ther Injuns ter glory by shootin' 'em," said one.

The affair had certainly made the mysterious parson more popular than ever among the wild spirits of Miner's Roost.

As for Nat Sykes, Lasso Dave and Darby, they were a bad lot and a disturbing element which the best of the miners were glad to get rid of.

"Them two, Nat Sykes and Dave, never tuk

ther warnin' ther parson give 'em when Buffalo Bill were here, by shootin' 'em through ther arm, and so havin' convaried 'em he sends 'em up ter glory a-shoutin'," said a miner, and that happened to be the general opinion, or a statement of facts in a nutshell.

Returning to the hotel the parson went to the stranger's room and said quietly:

"Come, brother, I will lead you to my cabin."

"You think I had better go then?"

"If you stay your death is certain, for those three men whom I removed from this world of sin and sorrow, have friends, bad as they are, and you will not be allowed to escape alive, and no man is safe from an assassin."

"You are right, parson, and I will take your advice."

"Here are my traps, and where is my horse?"

"The landlord led him to my cabin."

"Come."

"I am with you."

The parson led the way, and unseen they gained the base of the hill where they met Landlord Jerry.

"Your horse is there, sir," he said.

"I thank you, sir, sincerely."

"This gold-piece will pay my bill, and I appreciate your kindness."

Jerry grasped the money and the stranger's hand as well, and said:

"Luck to you, sir, and don't let this little affair to-night give Miner's Roost a bad name, while next time you come just bring me proof that you are not Kit Quantrel."

"I will, sir," and the stranger was passing on when Jerry continued:

"The parson will set you on the right trail, sir, for he knows 'em all."

"We are proud of our parson here in Miner's Roost, and we is likely to have a row ter keep him, as ther Hard Times citizens say they wants him and will come down some night and clean us out for our Gospil guide; but they better try it on, for we don't give up our Scriptur' sharp for gold or lead."

"He's a dandy and kin out-preach, out-pray, out-sing, and out-shoot any man as ever said Amen."

"I believe you," fervently said the stranger, and he hastened on after Parson Paul, who had walked slowly on up the steep path to his cabin.

The stranger's horse was there, saddled, bridled and hitched to a tree, and the parson set to work and soon had his own ready.

Then they mounted and rode away back on the ridge.

The parson never swerved from the track, keeping it unerringly in the darkness, until, after a ride of a couple of hours, they descended into a well-worn trail.

"Here is the Overland Trail, brother, and it is just ten miles to Miner's Roost, which lies in that direction."

"I would advise that you leave the camps as far behind you as possible."

"I thank you, sir, most sincerely, and shall take your advice."

"It is moonlight now, and I shall have no trouble in finding my way."

"None, I think."

"Now I will say to you good-by, and I only hope that I may be able to return the favor you have this night done me."

"I owe you my life, sir, and feel it in my heart that it is a debt that can never be fully repaid, except by a like service."

"Good-by, parson, and I hope some day we may meet again."

"I hope so, brother, and good-by—remember, that is the way you go."

"Yes, my friend," and with a grasp of the hand, the stranger was turning away when he said:

"Pardon me, but may I not offer you a sum in gold, for some charity, you know?"

"No, brother, I cannot take your gold—good-night," and the parson turned away, leaving the stranger standing in the trail.

The parson disappeared in the thicket, and then slipped from his horse.

He crept back until he caught sight of the stranger going up toward Miner's Roost.

Then the parson went back to his horse, took something from his saddle-pockets, and slipped a muller upon each hoof of his horse.

Mounting, he rode back into the trail to see the stranger far ahead in the moonlight.

A ride of a mile or more and the stranger turned off the Overland Trail at a path which the parson seemed to know, as he muttered:

"I thought so."

Then he dismounted, and went on on foot until he reached the path, and following it to a rise, saw the stranger far ahead.

Returning to his horse, he mounted, and followed until dawn, when he halted with the remark:

"I am in doubt; but I'll follow him to the end of this trail."

CHAPTER LX.

THE TRAIL'S END.

PARSON PAUL was as deliberate in all he did as a man who knew that there was no hurry and that haste might spoil a well-laid plan.

He halted at dawn until the stranger had gone on for a long distance.

Then he took the mullers off of the hoofs of his horse and followed the trail unerringly.

He knew the ground well, and he stuck to that trail as a hound would have done, only he did not wish to gain upon the one who led.

All day long he followed, and now and then he would come to a ridge with a plain beyond, and he could have a view for miles ahead.

And then his glass showed him the man he was tracking.

As dark came on, the parson pressed on a little more rapidly until he could no longer see the trail.

Then he halted for much-needed rest for man and beast.

The next morning, with the first glimmer of dawn, he was again on the trail, and, after going along for a couple of hours, branched off into a canyon, then went ahead on foot.

He was gone for several hours.

Then he returned to his horse, and, mounting, went on the back trail at a lively gait.

He went straight to his cabin, arriving late in the night, and set to work cooking provisions in great quantity.

Then he sat down and wrote three separate notes, and, this done, he looked to his weapons, got out some more ammunition, and, saddling his horse, threw his bag of provisions across his back, along with a roll of blankets.

Then he set off on foot through Miner's Roost, where he went to the hotel-stables and got one of Landlord Jerry's best horses.

An hour after found him camping in a canyon, where, after staking his horse out, he mounted the led animal and dashed away at a rapid pace just as dawn began to break.

All day he was gone, but after nightfall he returned and on foot.

Then he mounted his own horse, rode down the Overland Trail until he came to where the stranger had turned off, and pressed rapidly on through the night.

Just at dawn he sought a hiding-place and went into camp.

It was noon when he awoke, and he went away on foot, leaving his horse and traps.

What he went for he seemed to have discovered, for he came back and settled down for another rest.

At night he changed his camping-place, and every now and then, as he walked along—for he spared his horse all in his power—he halted and seemed to stick something in the ground.

Finding another camping-place, he again went off on foot, and after a walk of a couple of miles came in sight of the glimmer of camp-fires.

He went cautiously now, and after considerable difficulty got a view of what appeared to be a camp of soldiers, for a number of tents were in view.

And as he watched them, men were seen striking camp, and a large cavalcade of horsemen and pack-animals moved away in a northerly direction.

The parson followed on foot until he saw them file into a narrow canyon leading into the very heart of the mountains.

Then he returned to his horse, and mounting, rode rapidly up a valley toward a lofty range.

He gained a high ridge before dawn, and then again went into camp, as though to wait for some one, for he took up a position on a rock with his glass in hand.

Dawn came, and still he watched.

Then he saw more horsemen come in sight.

They rode along a shelf of rock overhanging a deep canyon, some seventy feet in width.

The shelf ended there, and they could go no further.

But two men appeared on the other side, and one of them shot an arrow across to which a string was attached.

Then the larger crowd drew on the string until a rope came over, and the two men on the other side began to push at some long black object until the others had drawn it across the chasm and made it fast to the pines that grew along the edge of the canyon.

Ropes were stretched out then on either side and made fast to trees, and the parson's glass revealed a strong bridge across the chasm.

Soon after other horsemen appeared in sight, and a number of pack-animals.

One by one the horses were led across the seemingly frail bridge, and without a single accident.

Then all but two men on foot had crossed, and these let go the lines and cables, and the bridge was drawn slowly back to the other side and disappeared.

Then the two men went back down the trail. But the parson was on their track and afoot.

He followed them for miles until they came to a place where they could cross the canyon.

Still he tracked them, and when they reached the spot where he had last seen the crowd drag the bridge over, there were horses awaiting them, which they mounted and rode away.

But the parson followed and at night again came in sight of the glimmer of camp-fires.

He crept forward and lay for a long while taking in the situation.

At last he started upon his return to his horse, and wearied out arrived at daybreak.

After a rest of some hours he took out his note-book and wrote something upon it.

This he fastened to a stick, and riding to the spot where the bridge had been stretched across the canyon he stuck it up in a place where it would be seen by anyone coming to the ledge of rocks.

Having done this he went at a rapid pace down the trail the horsemen had come, rounded the mouth of the canyon and went upon the other side toward the place where he had last seen the camp.

It was a long ride, and a hard one, for he followed his own ideas of the direction.

At last he came near the other side of the canyon where the bridge had been stretched across, and going into camp went about on foot as though searching for something.

His search was successful, for he returned to his camp with the remark:

"I have done my duty and they must do theirs."

CHAPTER LXI.

THREE SLIPS OF PAPER.

"At last!" cried Jack Crawford, as going his rounds after a letter from the Surgeon Scout, he found there a slip of paper.

He had never missed his dangerous mission of going the rounds once every two weeks, but, except in two instances, he had each time met with disappointment.

Now he opened the slip of paper and read:

"The League is needed at once.

"Also force of soldiers, not less than forty.

"Avoid coming through mining-camps and meet at Death's Canyon

"If no one there to meet you, find slip of paper by marble cross under ground, and follow directions."

Away went Jack Crawford with all haste to the ford to give the slip of paper to Buffalo Bill and tell him that the Surgeon Scout was not dead, as all had again begun to fear was the case.

That same day Sunset Sam was driving along on the Overland, when he drew rein by a large tree not far from Miner's Roost.

A branch of the tree extended over the trail, and, standing upon his box, Sunset Sam put his hand over the limb.

It returned with a slip of paper found there, pinned securely to the limb.

He at once opened the paper and read:

"If you meet Red Rider, tell him to give you his pouch to take back to Jumping Off City while he waits at Death's Ranch for company.

"He will find slip in his office."

Sunset Sam drove rapidly on, and there was an expression on his face as though he felt satisfied with himself, and that evening he arrived at Hard Times two hours ahead of his usual hour.

Along the Overland Trail, flying like the very wind and approaching the most dismal part of the road, was a horseman.

It was Red Butterfly, mounted upon his fleetest and best horse.

But he halted suddenly as he drew in sight of the marble cross erected on the spot where the stage-coach had been wiped out of existence, and, throwing aside the leaves and some loose earth, took out of the ground a slip of paper.

It was as follows:

"Have made the discovery, and notified League, and soldiers.

"You are to send your pouch through by Sam, if you have not yet met him and seen his slip of paper.

"Then go to Blue Rock and strike my trail and see how it is marked.

"Return here and await coming of League and cavalry, and guide them by marked trail, lead where it may.

"The end is at hand."

The Red Rider of the Overland read this slip of paper several times, and then, mounting his horse, set out to obey orders.

That night he returned to the Death Canyon, and sought a secure hiding-place to camp, but from which he could see the marble cross and any one going there.

It was nearly dawn when he was awakened by the sound of hoof-falls, and he knew that those he expected had arrived, so he gave the Pony Rider's call peculiar to him.

It was promptly answered, and advancing he beheld a number of horsemen.

"Bravo, Red Butterfly, you are here," cried Buffalo Bill, meeting him.

"Yes, sir, and I am glad to see you here so soon."

"We pushed hard; but here is Lieutenant Ames and his company, besides my League."

They all greeted the Red Butterfly, who said:

"I will get my horse and go at once and camp on the trail until dawn, for it will be best not to be seen."

So he led the way, Buffalo Bill by his side, and who asked:

"But who sent you there to await us, Red Butterfly?"

"I received secret orders from one whom I always obey."

So on they rode, the Red Rider leading the way, until they reached the point where he had

gone upon receiving the slip of paper, and marked the trail.

Going into camp for a few hours, they then mounted and pressed on, the Red Butterfly following the trail which the parson had marked.

The pace was not too fast to jade the horses, and frequent stops were made to rest men and beasts.

But it was noon of the following day when the Red Butterfly led the soldiers and the scouts, true as a hound on the trail, to the chasm where the bridge had been thrown across.

"You have gone wrong, pard," said Buffalo Bill.

"No, for see there!"

Across the canyon a form appeared, and those who knew him recognized the Pistol Parson of Miner's Roost.

He held in his hands a bow and arrow, and the latter came flying across, a string attached to it.

Then he called out:

"Butterfly, follow my marked trail down to a crossing-place, and bring several men with you."

The order was obeyed, and a couple of hours later they appeared upon the other side, with the parson, and all were rolling along some heavy object.

Need I tell the reader that it was the swinging bridge so cleverly manufactured by those whom the parson had seen cross over upon it?

The soldiers quickly seized the ropes, brought over the arrow line, and dragged the bridge across, when, unmindful of its swinging and the dizzy height, the parson walked across and was greeted by Lieutenant Ames, Buffalo Bill and the Powell brothers, who had met him in Miner's Roost.

He showed the soldiers how to make taut the ropes and then started across leading Lieutenant Ames's horses.

Red Butterfly followed with his horses, then Buffalo Bill, Jack Crawford and the others, until the last soldier had gone across in safety.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE BUZZARDS' ROOST.

"Now, parson, let me know just what all this means, for we expected to meet here Surgeon Powell to guide us," said Lieutenant Ames, after the force had gone into camp across the bridge.

"You will meet the Surgeon Scout later, Brother Ames, for he is on the trail, and I must say that it is owing to him that I am now here to guide you.

"The truth is, the Red Buzzards got worsted in a fight with the Indians, and you know that they were beaten off from attacking the coach?"

"Yes, I remember."

"It cut them up considerably, and the chief, in disguise, went to Miner's Roost to spy, and came very near being hanged there.

"But I saved his life, and then, in doubt myself if he was Quantrel or not, I trailed him."

"And it was Quantrel?"

"Yes, sir; and he seemed to have had enough for awhile, as he returned to his men, broke camp, and led them up into these mountains, where no horse can come save by the swinging bridge which the outlaws made to throw pursuit off their track.

"Quantrel is full of these clever schemes, and unless trailed close an army could not catch him, for he can take his band and horses anywhere with the contrivances he has.

"He is now encamped six or seven miles from here, not once suspecting danger, and to-night I will guide you down upon his camp and we can make short work of them, for trees are plenty and ropes can be had for the asking," said the parson, significantly.

"What is his force?"

"He has over a dozen wounded men, a prisoner, a couple of negro servants, and his band of fighting men in camp number just twenty-one."

"And we double him."

"And surprise him too, sir."

"When will you move?"

"About midnight, and the Red Butterfly will lead you by one pass, while I guide the scouts by another."

"But does the Red Butterfly know the way?"

"Oh, yes, for he has been here before.

"He will make no mistake, Lieutenant Ames."

"I can well understand that; but where is Surgeon Powell?"

"You will find him when you take the roost of the Red Buzzards."

"Hail he is the prisoner then."

"By Jove, I pity poor Frank Powell if he has been in the hands of those fiends," said Lieutenant Ames feelingly.

Then as the parson walked away the young commander gave his orders for the night attack.

As the parson walked away the Indian youth joined him, and they went on in silence together until they had gotten beyond the line of the camp.

"You have seen the camps, sir?"

"Yes, Red Butterfly."

"You were near enough to note who was there, for I heard you say that Quantrel still had his prisoner?"

"I saw him last night, Red Butterfly."

"I feel contented now, and I only have to seek my revenge upon that one man."

"The Indian in me will show itself, for I am revengeful and when I am avenged, by the death of that man, Kit Quantrel, I will, I believe, be almost happy."

"I hope so, and perhaps with time, change and seeing you he may yet regain his reason; but now we must prepare for the march, and you know our signals agreed upon, so you will lead the soldiers to the upper pass, while I will guide the Scouts' League to the lower cut and we can hem them in so that no man should escape."

"It should be so," was the response of the Indian youth, and the two parted.

An hour after the two mysterious guides, the parson, and the Red Butterfly mounted their horses and rode away at the head of the respective commands, the soldiers and the scouts.

It was dark, but Red Butterfly showed no hesitancy about leading the way, greatly to the pleasure of the young commander, who had felt doubtful, as he had no idea where it was that the Indian youth had learned the country as he seemed to know it.

The ride was a slow one, and over an hour passed before the Indian guide came to a halt and said:

"I will go ahead alone, sir."

He glided away on foot, and soon the shrill, mournful sound of the whippoorwill was heard.

It was kept up for a dozen notes, and then silence followed, when far off down the canyon came the same cry, faintly heard.

Then the Indian youth returned, and said:

"We will move now, sir."

"How far off is the camp, Red Butterfly?"

"Not a quarter of a mile away, sir."

The soldiers moved on, and at length, after a word from the Indian in a low tone, the lieutenant gave the order for the soldiers to close up in fours.

"Now, sir," said the Indian youth, as again the notes of the night-bird were heard.

He repeated it sharp and clear, and then came the command from Lieutenant Ames:

"Forward! trot—charge!"

The troopers sprung forward like an avalanche, and out of the dark canyon into a valley they went, where the white tents of the outlaws were before them.

And with wild yells, their ringing war-cries, from the other pass came the scouts, and the outlaws were between two fires.

Hemmed in, though strong men, and surprised, the outlaws yet came from their beds armed for the fray.

There was a rattling of fire-arms, and mingling with it were the cheers of the soldiers, war-cries of the Scouts' League, the rattling of accouterments and trampling of hoofs.

Dawn was breaking, and the fighting, struggling forms in the gray mists looked like grim specters.

And when the sun rose over the mountain-tops, it shone upon a strange scene, one only to be found in wild Western warfare.

The battle had ended, and many had bitten the dust.

There were soldiers lying here and there, and many dead outlaws.

Several scouts were wounded, yet none seriously, and Surgeon Schufeldt was busy, aided by the parson, who had figured grandly in the fight.

And over by the chief's tent sat the prisoner of the outlaw chief, poor Daniel Darwin, while near him stood the young Indian, striving in vain to force him into conversation with him, for all he could get from the poor unfortunate was the plaintive wail:

"I don't remember."

CHAPTER LXIII.

CONCLUSION.

LIEUTENANT AMES's face wore a bright smile over the victory gained.

The band of Red Buzzards had been almost wholly wiped out, and their horses, their baggage and tents had all been taken.

A few bold men had mounted their horses and dashed boldly through the soldiers' line.

They had been pressed so hard by Red Butterfly, the parson, and Buffalo Bill and his scouts, that they had not time to take the trail they had wished, and so had driven down the canyon, which ended at a precipice, overhanging a foaming torrent, many feet below.

"Drive them to their doom!"

"They deserve it!" came in the ringing voice of the Red Butterfly, and the words were answered by the war-cries of the scouts.

The outlaws saw their fate, it seemed, for they drew rein; half turned, as though to stand at bay and then, beholding that whirlwind of avengers, turned again in flight.

The Indian youth, side by side with the parson, pressed them close, and behind were Buffalo Bill and his matchless men.

With a wild shriek, like a death-cry, the outlaws took the fatal leap.

Over they went into the darkness, and down into the rushing torrent below.

The Red Butterfly and the parson drew rein suddenly, as did the others, and the scouts in chorus uttered their cries of triumph.

After gazing down into the depths for a minute in silence, the parson said:

"You are avenged, Red Butterfly, for Kit Quantrel led his band over that cliff to death."

"So be it, I am content," was the low reply, and he turned his horse back up the canyon toward the camp.

As they returned Lieutenant Ames called out:

"Parson, the Surgeon Scout is not here as a prisoner, nor is he among the dead or wounded."

"No one knows aught about him, though that poor fellow Darwin is here."

"Yes, Ames, I am here," and off came the wig of long white hair, the gold-rimmed spectacles, and then it was that the once full-bearded face of Doctor Frank Powell was recognized, and shout after shout rent the air, for the "parson" was found to be as he expressed it himself: "A wolf in lamb's clothing."

It was a couple of days before the soldiers started back from the outlaws' retreat, and all noticed the kind devotion of Red Butterfly for Daniel Darwin, until the story came out that he was the adopted father of the Red-Skin Rider.

Reaching the Overland Trail the Red Rider stopped with his adopted father for the coming along of Sunset Sam's coach on its eastward run.

Lieutenant Ames urged him to go on to the fort, but he said that he must return eastward at once, and resigned his position as Pony Rider.

Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell waited with him, and saw the two safe aboard of Sunset Sam's coach.

And away rolled the coach, and gazing after it Surgeon Frank Powell said:

"Bill, old fellow, I am going to tell you a secret."

"Yes, Frank?"

"No one else upon the border knows it except myself."

"I will not betray the secret, Frank," said Buffalo Bill.

"I know that, and so I tell you, and with the consent of the one concerned."

"Do you know that the Red Butterfly is a woman?"

Buffalo Bill started, and his face showed that he had never suspected the secret.

"It is true, and she is the daughter of the old mad Sioux chief, Patolla, who was killed defending Daniel Darwin from Quantrel and his outlaws, and he adopted the girl, had her educated, came West after more gold, was captured, and that splendid, brave girl, dressed as a man, came here to rescue or avenge him."

"Now, Bill, you understand how it was that Red Butterfly knew the country so well."

"Yes, the mystery is solved, and it is a secret worth knowing," said Buffalo Bill, earnestly, as the two sworn pardons started on their trail to the fort.

After some minutes of silence Buffalo Bill said:

"Frank?"

"Yes."

"You ought to go into the ministry, for I never saw your equal as the Fighting Parson of Miner's Roost."

THE END.

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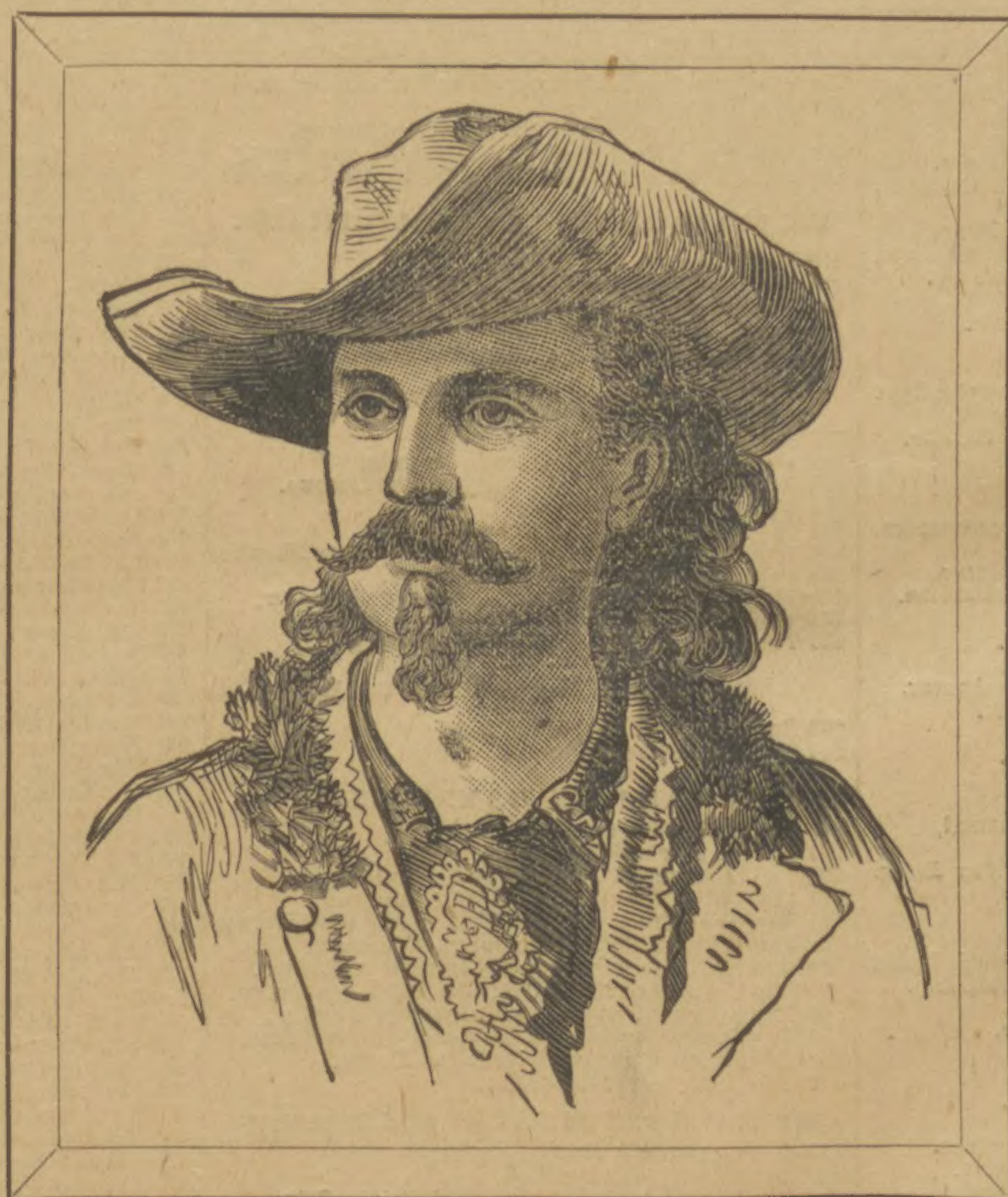
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